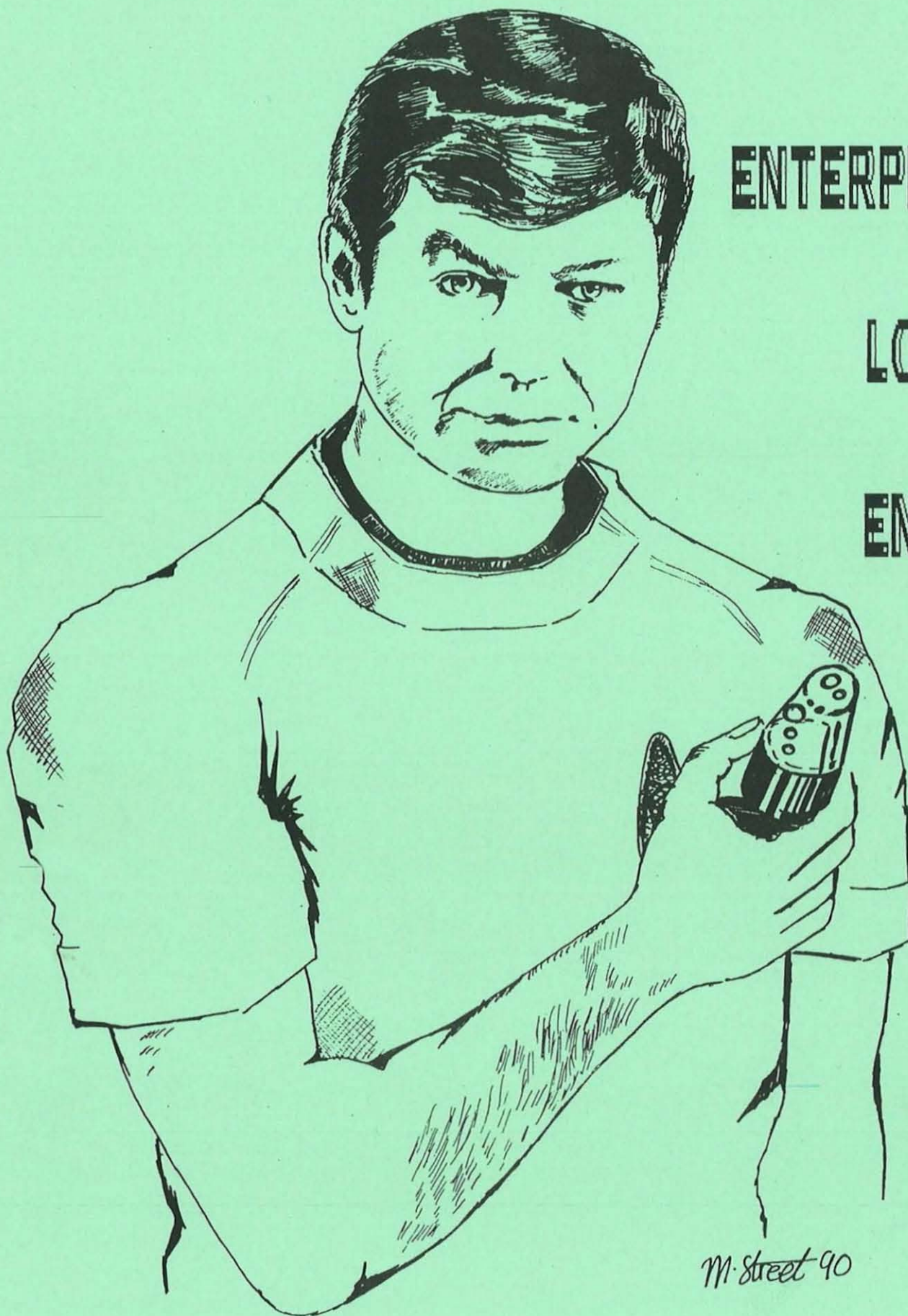




ENTERPRISE -

LOG

ENTRIES

85

M. Street '90

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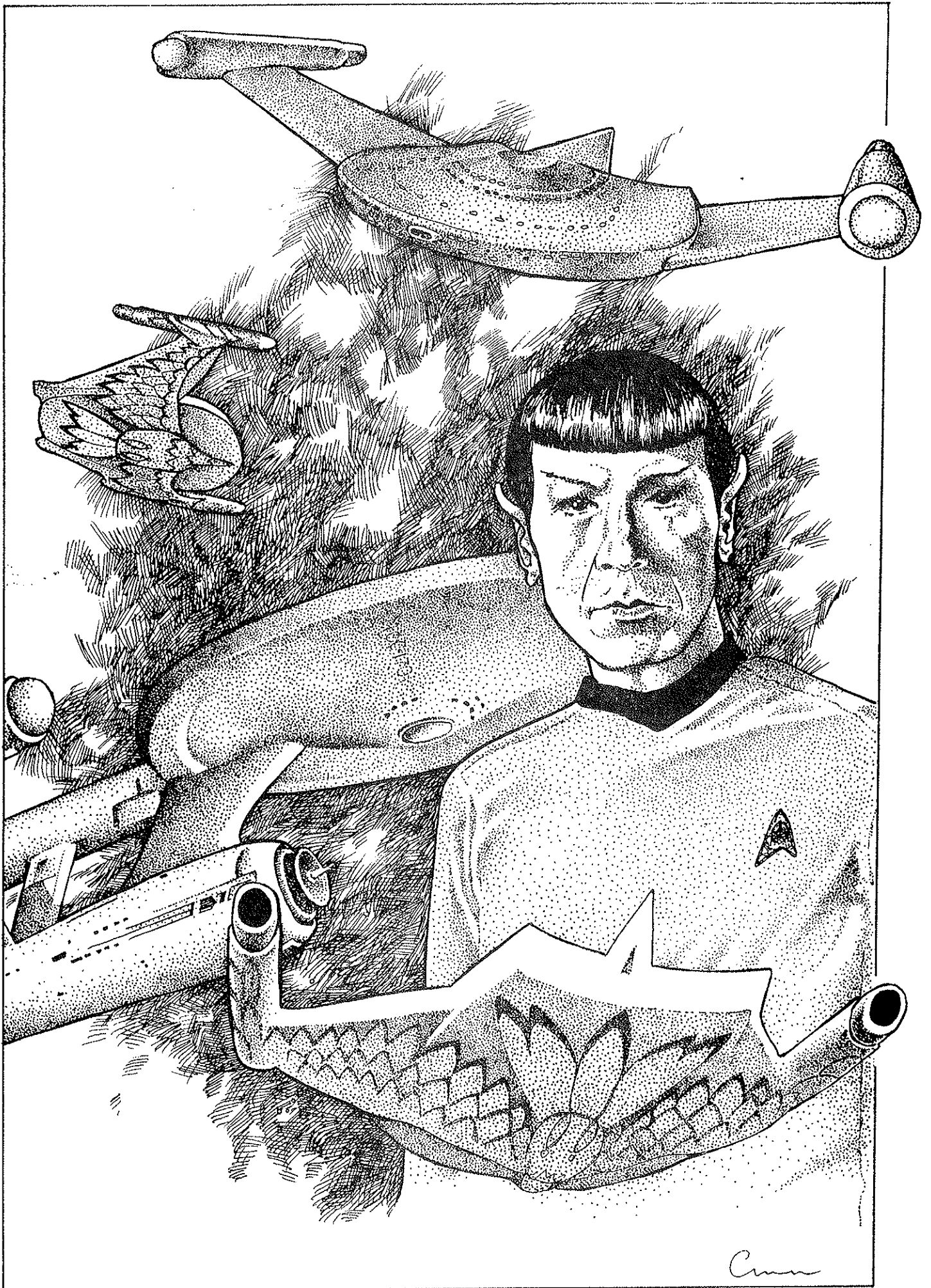
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ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

by

Jean Sloan

"Captain William Anstey? Why have I heard of him?" Leonard McCoy frowned.

"He was involved in the territorial dispute on Ramos IV - he was an ensign on the Argos at the time. He saved the life of Elder Ramin by discovering a plot to assassinate him, and by doing so provided the means of solving the dispute and persuaded the Ruling Council that the Federation was worth joining. He was promoted, and has just made Captain." Jim Kirk took a thoughtful sip from his brandy glass. "I met him once - he has a very forceful personality."

"Sounds like someone we know," McCoy smiled. "What will you do while he is in command of the Enterprise?"

"I don't know yet. A spot of leave, visit home, look up a few old friends, catch up on a spot of reading..."

"You don't sound thrilled with the idea of six weeks off."

"I'm not. I don't like the idea of leaving the Enterprise in the hands of someone I don't know. I know a final Command test is important, but..."

"... you'd rather he didn't do it on your ship," the Doctor smiled.

"I know, Bones - he's got to take his test somewhere. It's just... well... it makes me realise that I'm not indispensable." James T. Kirk grinned. "Spock'll be here to keep an eye on him, so I can rest easy." He downed the remainder of his brandy.

McCoy proffered the bottle, but Kirk shook his head. "No thanks. I've got some paper work to clear up before I go off ship tomorrow."

Later in the evening, as Kirk was just finishing up, the door to his cabin opened and Spock walked in. Kirk smiled at him ruefully.

"Well, Spock, all my paper work is up to date. I'm packed and ready to go into exile."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I thought you were going to Iowa," he said mildly. "We have just achieved orbit around Starbase 6. Lt. Uhura has checked the times of the shuttles to Earth. There is one leaving at 15.00 hours tomorrow which you should be able to catch."

"Definitely. I have to hand over command to Anstey at 09.00

hours. I still haven't decided what I'm going to do after Iowa, but I'll keep you informed in case..."

"I do not foresee any difficulties," said Spock. Then, more gently, "But frequent communications from you would be... welcome."

Kirk opened his mouth to tease but shut it again at the slightly wistful expression in Spock's eyes. "It's a pity you couldn't come with me - we could have gone Outward Bound. Dammit, I don't feel like leave. It's Murphy's Law - you only get leave when you don't need it."

At three minutes past nine the following morning James T. Kirk plus his baggage waited in the transporter room accompanied by Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott, his Chief Engineer. At nine o'clock precisely William Anstey materialised, and stepping smartly forward introduced himself. Kirk gave him an appraising look before shaking hands and introducing his staff.

"I have heard so much about the Enterprise and her officers," commented Anstey when the formalities were completed. "It will be a privilege working with you, gentlemen. Captain Kirk, if I may?" He stepped over to the transporter console and flexed his hands over the controls. "May I wish you a good leave."

Spock, standing just behind Anstey, raised one eyebrow at the expression on Kirk's face. Kirk for his part was wondering if he had managed to appear as confident as Anstey when he took over the Enterprise as its permanent Captain.

"Goodbye, Spock. Gentlemen," said Kirk. He refrained from asking Spock to 'mind the store'. Spock nodded as the transporter beam took effect.

Ten days later James T. Kirk stood looking out over the yard of the Iowa farm where he had been brought up. The farm itself no longer belonged to his mother, but the farmhouse was her home. She had sold off the land to a sympathetic neighbour and retained the house, garden and yard.

The Captain had just finished unpacking, having decided to visit the Great Barrier Reef to swim, sunbathe and snorkel, but first he wanted to inform Spock of his destination. He switched on the comm unit in his room and logged a call to Starfleet Headquarters Relay Centre. Within five minutes he had contact and asked for a relay to the Enterprise. His request was acknowledged, and he listened to the inevitable piped music while he waited. To his surprise, when the screen cleared he was faced with Vice-Admiral Clarkson.

"Good day, Captain Kirk. You wish to contact the Enterprise?"

"Yes. I promised my First Officer I would let him know my leave itinerary once it was decided, that's all. Is there a problem?"

"As your message is not urgent, no. The Enterprise is on patrol in Sector 8. At the moment there is a communications blackout in the area - a lot of static. It may actually originate

at Starbase 6 and be part of Anstey's command test scenario. Anyway, we have been out of touch with the ship for the last eight hours. Leave your message with me - I'll transmit it as soon as we have channels open."

"Right, sir. Thank you for taking the trouble to tell me."

Kirk was grateful. No explanation was due to him. The Captain of a vessel was normally denied all details of a command test. The candidate himself didn't know what to expect until he took up the post. He switched off the comm unit and frowned.

Static blackouts were not uncommon, and could last for days, but there were methods of piercing such a blackout. Why hadn't the Enterprise done so? On the other hand, perhaps Clarkson was right and it was part of Anstey's test. Kirk tried to shake off a growing feeling of unease.

This is ridiculous, he thought. Subconsciously I'm expecting something to go wrong just because I'm not out there. I shouldn't be so possessive. The self analysis did not please him especially, but he always tried to face the truth. He acknowledged that he had been looking forward to contact with the ship and with Spock, however brief that contact.

He went down to the kitchen where his mother had prepared lunch. The neighbours, Sam and Marsha Miles, were there with their daughter Rina. She was a schoolteacher, spending the holiday with her parents but about to return to her school in Boston. She was lovely.

"All sorted, dear?" asked Winona Kirk, slightly bothered by the frown on her son's face.

"As far as I can be," he answered. "I can't contact the Enterprise because of a glitch in communications. Spock'll have to keep on guessing my whereabouts."

"Do Vulcans guess?" inquired Rina.

"Not if they can help it," replied Kirk. "They certainly would never admit to doing so."

"What's it like, working with a Vulcan? How can you deal from day to day with someone when you can't tell what he's thinking, and who doesn't respond to friendship, or for that matter to anger when you want a good quarrel to get something out of your system?"

Rina's question irritated Kirk slightly. What she was expressing was the common view of the Vulcan character, held by those who had never met a Vulcan. But he wasn't about to put her straight - he was far too careful of Spock's privacy to explain to her.

"When I want a quarrel I go and annoy Dr. McCoy, my Chief Surgeon."

"So Humans couldn't work solely with Vulcans - without other emotional outlets, I mean."

"It depends on the Human, and the Vulcans. All Humans and all Vulcans are individuals, after all." Kirk strove to keep his voice calm and matter-of-fact. To his surprise his mother came to his

rescue.

"Rina, dear, you'd have to get to know Mr. Spock before you could judge him. I have met him twice, and I found him very pleasant to get on with. He was kind, courteous, and very gentle. He and Jim are good friends."

Rina's face registered surprise, but Kirk had had quite enough; he wasn't about to embark on a discussion of his friendship for Spock.

"Excuse me, everyone, I must collect my gear. I'll have to leave soon." And he was gone.

"Oh dear," commented Rina quietly, "I seem to have upset him."

"No, my dear," said Winona. "It's just that Vulcans prize their privacy, and Jim is just protecting Spock's."

When Kirk analysed his irritation he realised that it was as much the result of being unable to contact the Enterprise as of Rina's curiosity. But there was something else - that feeling of unease that he couldn't help and couldn't explain was growing in intensity. He shook himself mentally and picked up his luggage.

As Kirk's form dissolved in the transporter Mr. Spock turned to William Anstey. "Sir, if you would care to accompany me, I will show you to your quarters. Your sealed orders are on your desk."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Mr. Scott, Dr. McCoy, please come to Briefing Room 2 in thirty minutes. Mr. Scott, please ask all other department heads to join us."

As Bill Anstey followed Spock out he allowed himself to relax just a little. His air of confidence was not achieved without some cost in tension; and to tell the truth he was a little nervous of working with Spock. The Vulcan's reputation in Starfleet was high, and Anstey had never worked closely with a Vulcan before.

They reached the Captain's quarters and Spock stepped aside to allow Anstey to precede him. Anstey slotted the disk holding his orders into the computer.

"Well, that's straightforward enough for the moment. Proceed to Sector 8 to take part in manoeuvres with the second fleet." He thumbed the intercom. "Navigator?"

"Chekov here, sir."

"Mr. Chekov, plot a course for sector 8. Implement at warp 4. Captain out."

The crew was well briefed on the temporary change of command, and Bill Anstey, forever thorough, had done his homework on the crew.

"Right, Mr. Spock, let us proceed to the briefing."

Bill Anstey introduced himself to his senior officers and gave

them such details of the mission as he possessed. As the department heads in their turn briefed him on the status of the ship, Spock had a chance to observe the young man. His boyish good looks reminded him of James Kirk when he had first come on board the Enterprise, but Anstey did not quite have Kirk's confidence. Under the rather brash air Spock could sense the inner tension of the man. However, perhaps in time he would relax. It was early days yet.

Spock was rather surprised that they had been assigned to manoeuvres in the command test; it was more normal for the candidate to be asked to undertake a standard mission. He suspected that Anstey might be in line for some prepared surprise along the way; he wondered if Anstey himself had realised the possibility.

To his surprise the young Captain did not ask him for a status report on the Science Section. As the others filed out Spock asked him why not.

"Well, Mr. Spock, you are my second in command. As such, I presume that problems in the Science department, should they arise, would be reported to me automatically. The other department heads are of less senior rank, so I expect their reports as a matter of course. It is good training for them."

Spock raised an eyebrow at the slightly abrupt tone, but said nothing. Perhaps Anstey had not really realised just how experienced the Enterprise's senior officers were. Captain Kirk saw such sessions as a way to keep the entire staff briefed on what projects all departments were undertaking, so that individual department heads would not become isolated in their own subject areas. Obviously Anstey regarded briefing meetings as a means of training.

For his part, Anstey wondered what the Vulcan was thinking. He found the lack of facial expression disconcerting. In fact he had not requested a report from Spock because he was daunted by the Vulcan's presence. It would have seemed an insult to ask Spock to explain his organisation.

Nine days later the Enterprise was patrolling Sector Z6 on the edge of the Neutral Zone. The ship had settled to routine, and Anstey seemed more relaxed. The manoeuvres had proceeded apace. Two mock battles had been staged; from one they had emerged victorious, from the other the ship had acquired both Human and mechanical 'casualties'. Now she had been ordered to patrol the Neutral Zone between outposts 4 and 7 looking for 'any sign of Romulan incursion into Federation territory.' This, from Anstey's orders, was the standard Starfleet instruction for such a patrol.

Spock was working in his quarters on a project he had in hand when the Red Alert sounded. He heard Scott's voice calling, "Captain to the bridge." He reached for the intercom.

"What is happening, Mr. Scott?"

"There are two Romulan vessels off our starboard bow, Mr. Spock. They are inside the Neutral Zone - but only just."

"On my way, Mr. Scott. Has Captain Anstey arrived yet?"

"No, sir. I'll page him again."

Spock arrived on the bridge at the same time as Anstey, who was breathless and without his command shirt, fresh from the gym. Both men looked at the viewscreen.

"Well, here's the surprise they had in store," said Anstey with conviction. "Realistic, aren't they?" he added, considering the eagle designs on the two alien vessels.

Spock frowned. It was an elaborate scenario for a command test, not to mention one capable of misinterpretation by any innocent ship in the area, as any incursion into the Neutral Zone was a violation of the treaty, and a passing vessel would have no reason to believe that what it was seeing was fake.

Anstey was speaking. "Ms. Uhura, establish communication with the alien ships."

As Uhura's hands moved over her board Spock turned to his own hooded viewer and switched it aft, facing into Federation space. He stared hard, trying to penetrate the blackness with his gaze. Suddenly he saw the shimmer.

"Mr. Sulu, hard to starboard, now." Spock spoke without raising his voice, but Sulu caught the urgency in his tone and reacted immediately. Several things happened at once: a third Romulan ship shimmered into existence; a photon torpedo mushroomed off the Enterprise's port bow; the Enterprise screamed in between the two visible Romulan vessels, scattering them, and putting herself in the Neutral Zone; and Captain Anstey shouted, "Mr. Spock, what do you think you are doing?"

Spock ignored him. "Mr. Sulu, get us out of here - now!"

"Belay that order, Mister!" Anstey was furious. "Explain yourself, Mr. Spock."

"Captain, there is no time. It is imperative that we return to Federation space immediately. This is not a command test."

"Nonsense, Mr. Spock. If..."

"Sir, Romulan vessels have surrounded us," interposed Sulu; then Uhura, "Romulan Commander is requesting voice communication, sir."

Anstey looked confused for a moment, then collected himself. "Stall him, Ms. Uhura. Now, Mr. Spock. Explanations, please."

"Sir, while you were..." Spock hesitated for a moment "... assessing the situation, I turned my personal scanner aft sweep and saw the shimmer of the Romulan cloaking effect. As the shimmer occurs just before rematerialisation, I deduced that the vessel was decloaking to fire. There was no time to apprise you of the situation."

"Mr. Spock..."

"Captain, the Romulan Commander is insistent that you speak to him. I can't stall any longer." Uhura sounded frustrated.

"All right, put him on visual."

The viewer revealed the bridge of the Romulan vessel. Anstey

stared, unable to believe his eyes. Despite the photon torpedo, he had still half believed that it was all an elaborate mock-up for his sake. Though he now understood why Spock had acted as he had, his anger with the Vulcan did not dissipate. Mr. Spock must have suspected something or he would not have been scanning to the rear. He should have told Anstey his suspicions; taking action was a Command decision. There was, however, no time to tackle Spock at present.

"This is Commander T'Heyna of the Romulan warship Flywing. I would speak with Captain Kirk to discuss terms of the surrender of the USS Enterprise and all aboard her to the Romulan Empire."

"Commander, this is Captain William Anstey, presently in command of the Enterprise. You attacked our vessel without provocation. I demand that you call back your forces and let us proceed on our peaceful business."

"Captain Anstey, you violated neutral space in breach of treaty. You cannot stand upon your rights."

"Listen, T'Heyna, you know as well as I do that the ship which attacked my vessel was in Federation space, while you have violated the Neutral Zone by your mere presence in it. Our entry into the Zone was caused by the action we took to avoid damage. You have no right to threaten us. We have designs neither on your territory nor on your vessel."

"I say again, Captain Anstey, we await your surrender. You are surrounded. You have ten of your minutes to make your decision. Flywing out."

Anstey turned quickly to Uhura as the bridge doors swooshed open and McCoy appeared. "Ms. Uhura, get a message off to Starfleet at once explaining our situation. Yes, Doctor?"

"Who is responsible for throwing this ship around and shaking all my medical equipment off the shelves?" McCoy stopped suddenly, aware of the atmosphere on the bridge. He looked questioningly at Spock and Anstey.

Any answer was forestalled by Uhura. "I'm sorry, Captain, our communications are being jammed."

"Launch a distress beacon and message pod, then."

"Yes, sir. Launched."

"Dr. McCoy," continued Anstey, "there really is no place for you on the bridge right now. We have a spot of bother that will soon be sorted out. And Mr. Spock, please go to your quarters and await me there. There are some points I would like clarifying." He turned away and sat in the command chair.

McCoy left, casting a glance in Spock's direction. After pausing for a moment Spock followed; as he did so he heard Uhura's report that the message beacon had been destroyed.

When he arrived at his cabin McCoy was waiting for him. "What's going on, Spock?" he asked worriedly.

Spock gave him the facts and then sat back in his chair, fingers steepled.

"Why didn't you express your first doubts to him?" inquired the Doctor.

"Because I was acting on intuition. I do not readily trust my instincts, Doctor. When I found I was correct I had to act, not talk."

"You saved the ship. Can't he see that?"

"Apparently not, Doctor."

"We must relieve him of command."

"He has done nothing to warrant it. I mishandled the situation and I have lost his confidence. The difficulty now is that he may no longer listen to my advice. Our situation is grave. The message pod was destroyed."

At that moment the door swooshed open.

"Gentlemen," said Anstey stiffly.

"Captain," began Spock, "may I ask what action you have taken with the Romulans? The ten minutes is well up."

"I signalled our surrender, of course. There was no choice. When we get to their home base we will be able to explain matters, then sort it out from that end."

There was a moment of silence, then McCoy, his voice husky with shock, spoke. "You have what? The Romulans don't negotiate. They'll take the ship as a prize of war, then send us somewhere as slaves. They'll probably execute Spock if someone realises who he is. Starfleet don't know where we are. You won't be allowed to communicate with anyone. Why didn't you ask Spock's advice - or ask anyone on the bridge, for that matter? We should never have surrendered. You should have..."

"That is enough, Doctor." It was Spock who spoke. "It is done. Recriminations solve nothing. Captain, how do you propose to handle the situation from here on?"

"Follow the Romulan ship to its base, as I said I would."

"Captain, with respect, Dr. McCoy is right. You must not. The Enterprise is known to the Romulans for past... contacts. They would never agree to her release. I would suggest a planned break away, launching another distress buoy as we break formation, transporting it out of sensor range. Then we attempt to outrun the Romulan fleet. If we are caught, we must destroy the ship; the blast would attract attention to this part of space. There is more than just the Enterprise at stake here. Starfleet must be warned of a possible Romulan mass incursion into Federation territories."

"Mr. Spock," sighed Anstey, "while I appreciate that all along you have sought to be of help, times change. Gunboat tactics are old-fashioned. Let's try modern diplomacy. I cannot believe that a rational race would blame a ship - an inanimate object when all is said and done - under a new Captain, for an event that is history."

"Who said Romulans were rational? And they have long memories." McCoy's eyes flashed with anger as he spoke.

"Doctor, you are perilously near insubordination. I wish no more discussion of the matter - it's a Command decision. Mr. Spock, you are confined to quarters until further notice for taking unauthorised action."

Dr. McCoy opened his mouth to protest, but at a sign from Spock closed it again. Anstey left.

Bill Anstey felt relieved. He was sure he was doing the right thing, and he now had Mr. Spock off the bridge. He felt much more comfortable without him. If Spock hadn't ordered the Enterprise to take evasive action they would not have entered the Neutral Zone. Their shields had been up - they could have withstood one torpedo easily. He regained the bridge quietly, satisfied that he was in control, unaware of the disquiet around him.

"Cossack!" muttered Chekov to Sulu. "How dare he talk to Mr. Spock like that!"

Spock sat in his cabin. He had been meditating, but found it difficult to concentrate. He knew he had acted logically on the bridge, but he also realised that he had not adequately read the Human he was working with, and so had handled the situation badly. Jim would be trusting him to look after the ship; now it was in the hands of an untried Captain in a critical situation - it was quite obvious that the young man in charge did not realise *how* critical.

So Spock came to blame himself for the ship's predicament. He felt shame that he had let Kirk down; he was angry with himself and with Anstey, and frustrated that he was powerless to act. He found himself comparing Anstey with Jim Kirk. When Jim had assumed command he was hot-headed - still was, for that matter - but he had always taken advice; he valued his officers and accepted that he could make mistakes.

The most serious aspect of the affair was that the Federation did not know about the Romulan activity. The border had been peaceful for some years, kept so, it was rumoured, by troubles within the Empire. It was essential that Starfleet be made aware of their plight. It would be some time before radio silence made Starbase 6 suspicious.

Spock wondered if Kirk had tried to contact him as he had promised. The Captain would not accept the communications blackout as natural, or part of Anstey's test - he might realise... If only... But at this distance a mind touch would be impossible. Ridiculous to try...

Jim Kirk was waiting at Iowa Central for his shuttle to Australasia. It had been slightly delayed and he sat staring out onto the airfield, a look of distraction on his face. The feeling of unease had become more specific. He had developed a strong sense that Spock was in trouble. If that was the case, then so was the ship. Suddenly he made up his mind and crossed to the reservations desk. He cancelled his current ticket and booked a passage back to Starbase 6.

In his cabin Spock of Vulcan drew into a deeper level of meditation. He must stop pointless speculation. Kirk could not help them. His own emotions, his anger, his feelings of shame, would only serve to impair his logic - and he would need his mental faculties in perfect order if he was to remedy their plight. He became motionless as logic ordered his mind, banishing hope, considering only reality.

Vice-Admiral Mike Keynan-Arr watched Captain James T. Kirk pace backwards and forwards. "Jim, I agree that we must now consider the Enterprise overdue, and it is confirmed that she is somewhere in Sector Z6, but it is too early to go chasing after her, at least until Nogura lets us know the details of Anstey's Command test. As you know, each stage of the test is programmed into the Enterprise's computers; it may be her change of position is planned."

"Mike, are you seriously telling me that no-one here now knows where she should be? That no-one is monitoring the test?"

Keynan-Arr shifted uncomfortably. "That's about the size of it, Jim. We usually rely on the acting Captain calling in just as we would ordinarily, but we reckoned without the static cloud."

"Has it occurred to you that the 'static cloud' as you call it could be a deliberate communications block?"

"Why should the Enterprise scramble her comm system?"

"I wasn't thinking of the Enterprise causing the static. I was thinking of an enemy source - Romulan, for example. What's the matter with you? You're sitting on the very edge of Federation space; only a few years ago half of the outposts in this sector were destroyed by a Romulan incursion. How can you be so complacent?"

"Jim, really, you're becoming hysterical. Everyone knows the Romulans are occupied with matters at home. Why are you so certain that something is wrong? And what made you come tearing back here?"

"Call it a gut feeling - I'm certain, that's all. We don't know anything about Romulan activities - all we have is rumour. And I know they would dearly like to get their hands on the Enterprise. Look, let me speak to Nogura."

"He's in transit from Vulcan to Earth, Jim. You can't get him for another twelve hours or so."

"Well I'm not waiting. I want a ship!"

"Jim, that'd be most irregular. However, there is a freighter about to leave for Z6 to deliver supplies to the manned outposts. That would at least get you nearer to the Enterprise's last known position." *And out of my hair,* thought the Vice-Admiral.

Two days later a long-range shuttlecraft arced gracefully to a halt at the very point at which the Enterprise had left Federation space. The craft had last been berthed at the Starfleet research Facility on Z6, where it was being used in the testing of a new prototype cloaking device with fewer limitations than the Romulan model from which the technology had been 'borrowed'. It was ironic,

Kirk thought, that the person who had stolen the original had now stolen the copy.

The vessel's sensors detected the blast particles from the photon torpedo, and fuel residue from four ships. To Kirk's relief there was no debris.

Where are you, Spock? Where?

He was sick with worry about the Vulcan, knowing the consequences if his First Officer was recognised by the Romulans. They would execute Spock if they connected him with the theft of the cloaking device.

After a moment's hesitation Kirk piloted the shuttle into the Neutral Zone and set his course in the general direction of Romulus and Remus. He pressed a button. The tiny craft shimmered out of view.

The Enterprise was in orbit around Ri'Hanna. This was an outpost station - a sort of space lookout - for Romulus and Remus, the twin planets at the heart of the Romulan Empire. It was the nerve centre of the Romulan Fleet, and at that moment William Anstey was in the office of the Commodore of the Fleet, T'Krall. The Captain was trying to explain why he should be permitted to contact Starfleet.

"We do not deal with enemies, Captain. We are an honourable people. War is honourable - politics is not. As a soldier you should be begging now for an honourable death."

"You violated the treaty, not us. What is honourable in violating an agreement?"

"You talk of honour, Human? You who serve on the ship once commanded by the dishonourable James T. Kirk, who broke any treaty long before we did. It was Kirk who by trickery, lies and deceit was responsible for the theft of Romulan technology. Can espionage be honourable? We have long hoped to capture the Enterprise. Revenge is honourable." T'Krall turned to his bodyguards. "Bring forward the others."

'The others' were Spock, McCoy, Sulu and Chekov, who had been an audience to the exchange.

"You all have a choice. You can return to the Enterprise and show us her secrets, in which case you will live. Be aware that we will work them out eventually, even without your co-operation. Or you will join our slave population in our ore mining operations on Remus and elsewhere. There your life expectancy will be short. Your decisions?"

Anstey stood in dumb silence, disbelieving. Chekov, ever emotional, shouted, "I would rather die than work for you!"

"You *will* die," said T'Krall, "but I too would choose that option were I in your position." He looked at each of the others in turn. All shook their heads until he came to Spock.

"I will go aboard the Enterprise," Spock said quietly.

Chekov and Sulu looked at him, shocked. McCoy exploded, "Why, you dirty traitor! How could you, Spock? You're betraying Jim as well as us. I just hope you can live with yourself!"

Anstey looked at Spock curiously. "You and he," he motioned to T'Krall, "are of common stock. Your roots pull you together, perhaps?" He turned to T'Krall. "I repeat, I want no war with you. Like the Federation, I want peace. I will work to achieve it. I too will help on board the Enterprise to show my good faith." He smiled at Spock.

Spock's eyebrow rose, but he made no comment. He was, however, seriously troubled. He had agreed to help the Romulans because he wanted to seize any change to sabotage the ship. Anstey was a complication he could do without.

He caught McCoy's gaze on him; the doctor's expression was one of puzzlement, of confusion. Well, if he could blow the Enterprise out of space McCoy would probably work out his motives for himself. For now he would have to wonder.

T'Krall gave orders to the guards and they motioned their captives out. In the corridor Anstey and Spock were separated from the others. As they parted Spock said quietly, "Good luck, Doctor."

But McCoy walked away without a backward glance.

Spock felt heavy-eyed. They had been taken on board the Enterprise, fed, then put in the brig. The heaviness was that of a drug. As he came to full consciousness his time sense recovered, and he realised he had been unconscious for about ten hours. Two guards appeared and hauled him to his feet. A few moments later he was on the bridge, once more facing T'Krall and another young man with an air of dignity.

T'Krall spoke. "This is the Captain-Elect of the Enterprise, Sub-Commander T'Go'Ath. From now on you will work with him. First you will brief him on the design of the ship's engines; your Chief Engineer has refused his aid."

"All that you need to know is contained in the computer bank." Spock indicated the science station. "Access can be gained from there." Spock was stalling for time; he knew that the Romulans would not be able to interpret most of the computer data, which was presented in a shorthand form devised by himself and Mr. Scott. "However, sir, you cannot run this ship without a full crew complement."

T'Krall considered. "What you say is true. We have not finished removing your own crew yet. While we complete the staffing of the ship, our engineers will study your computer tapes. You will be returned to suitable quarters where you will be available to answer any queries."

Spock was led not to the brig but to his own cabin. It seemed the Romulans were prepared to treat him well while he co-operated. He was firmly pushed inside and the door was locked. With some relief he turned up the thermostat and settled to meditate. He honestly had no real plan of action, though he had to act soon; he did not know how long it would be before someone realised his close connection with Kirk and the theft of the cloaking device. That

realisation would herald his immediate execution. He must try to formulate a plan to annihilate the ship...

Or to steal her. The thought rang in his head. He could not believe that he had considered such a course of action. Was his at present deeply buried Human half capable of such folly, such impetuosity? Such an idea belonged to Kirk, not to him.

Find Spock, steal her, take her home. They were not his thoughts. They felt remarkably like Jim Kirk's, but that was impossible. Perhaps he was losing his mind. He relaxed his mental shields but there was nothing more. Condemning himself for allowing his fondness for his Captain to influence the clarity of his thinking, he began to formulate his plan.

He had found her. The Enterprise hung in spacedock in a large modern facility situated on an asteroid. Huge in the background Remus rotated slowly, looking a little like Earth, although all the land masses were wrong.

Kirk considered his situation. Obviously his most sensible course of action would be to return to Federation space and contact the authorities, but ultimately what could they do? He had left a tape of his flight plan back on Starbase 6. Someone would have read it by now.

He wished that he knew what had become of his crew; he was desperately worried about Spock and McCoy, and furious with the Starfleet authorities who had allowed the situation to develop this far because of their inefficiency. He wished desperately that Spock was with him; alone he wasn't sure that he had much chance of retaking the ship - he had to get aboard and rescue Spock. Together they stood a chance - a slim one. It never occurred to him that Spock might be dead or incapacitated.

Kirk made a decision. He could not transport in - the shuttle had no transporter - and although he could see that the doors of the shuttle deck on the Enterprise were open, he could hardly fly in. There was only one alternative, a thruster suit.

He nudged the shuttle gently towards the Enterprise, positioning it close to the great silver body, then he donned the suit and pushed himself out into space, now visible to any onlookers. However, he had a good chance of remaining undetected, as there were other beings in nondescript suits moving backwards and forwards among the gantries of the spacedock. He reached the shuttle deck space doors without incident and moved steadily inside, to realise that no-one was paying any attention his way.

The focus of all eyes was the scene being played out to the right of him. A shuttlecraft was loading personnel, crewmembers of the Enterprise. Another group, surrounded by guards, waited in a sort of pen, presumably to be loaded into a second shuttle which was being readied behind the first. The troops in evidence were heavily armed, but the prisoners were their concern, and they paid no attention to the figure clad in overalls who climbed out of the thruster suit and then walked towards the turbolift.

Halfway there Kirk almost tripped over a section of conduit; deciding it would be good cover he picked it up and finished off his journey purposefully. Inside the turbolift he breathed again. he

reflected that his luck was mainly due to the unlikeliness of his presence on his ship inside Romulan space. It was only a matter of time, however, before his shuttlecraft was discovered, and then the chase would be on.

He had directed the turbolift to the officers' quarters, though by what logic he was unsure. When the doors opened he looked out cautiously, to see Spock delivering a neck pinch to the guard who had been watching his door. Spock must have heard the lift door open because Kirk saw him tense for further action; but as the Vulcan swung round he saw Kirk, and the look of complete astonishment on his face made Kirk want to laugh. Instead he stepped forward and laid one hand on Spock's shoulder, putting a finger to his lips.

"Shush - inside, quick!"

He almost pushed Spock through the door, then returned to the corridor and pulled the guard in too. Spock was standing stock still in the middle of his cabin. Kirk looked at him, smiling.

"Captain, I cannot quite believe my eyes." The Vulcan spoke very formally. "I am very pleased to see you. I... sensed your thoughts, but dismissed the fact as an impossibility. I thought perhaps I was going insane..."

He tailed off, and Kirk realised that Spock was trembling. He pulled him into a bear hug.

"See, Spock, I'm real - and I'm very glad you're all right. But I've had so much luck that I think it's bound to run out soon. We've got work to do."

He released Spock, who however remained stiffly at attention.

"Captain, it is my fault that we are in this predicament. I..."

"Spock, we haven't time now. Tie up the guard." This last was said in a distinctive command tone, and Spock obeyed at once. Kirk sank into a chair, his head in his hands.

"Captain, are you ill?"

"No, Spock, just thinking. Can we barricade ourselves on the bridge?"

"It would be easier to take and hold auxiliary control," replied Spock thoughtfully, divining Kirk's intentions.

"But we can't switch power to auxiliary without going to the bridge first."

"I could by-pass the bridge circuitry from the auxiliary control room."

"Right, let's get to it. Help me undress that guard."

Spock raised an eyebrow but did as requested. When they had the uniform Kirk offered it to Spock, grinning. "Those ears are just the job. You can pretend I'm your prisoner if we're challenged."

.

They made their way directly to the auxiliary control room in Engineering. There was no point in being surreptitious - they walked purposefully and were not challenged. It surprised Kirk that the Romulans were so complacent about security, and he was delighted to find the auxiliary control room deserted. Spock removed a panel from the main console, then his head and shoulders disappeared inside. Kirk sat by the door to keep watch.

"Spock, do you have any idea what they've done with McCoy and the other senior officers?"

"No, Captain. When I saw McCoy last we were on the planet - they took most of the bridge crew for questioning. I have no reason to think they were brought back aboard."

"But you were."

"Yes, and Anstey. We agreed..." he hesitated "... to work for the Romulans."

"You wanted to find a way to destroy the ship?"

There was a pause. Spock was rather surprised that Jim Kirk understood so readily.

"Yes. It did occur to me to try to steal her, but I dismissed the idea as impossible."

"We'll see about that. Did you and Anstey have a plan?"

"We had no time to discuss it. Also, I think Captain Anstey's motives were... different."

"Please explain."

"I believe that in co-operating he was trying to show good faith. He believed that our rescue could be effected by diplomacy."

"Spock, I can see there are facts of which I am ignorant."

"Indeed, Jim."

"What about Scotty?"

"I have not seen him. I know he was kept on the ship, and that he refused to help the Romulans with his engines. The rest of the prisoners - crew and officers - are destined for forced labour camps. Though the bridge crew and McCoy have been separated from the rest, it would not be logical to ship them out separately. However, I am concerned that the Romulans might try to persuade Sulu, Chekov and Mr. Scott to co-operate, perhaps by torturing them. That is what they want from us - our technical expertise to explain the workings of the ship."

"Do you think that Bill Anstey might be doing that right now?"

"It is possible. But I think they were removing all Enterprise personnel first - that is why I was left in my cabin until such time as they were ready for me."

"D'you think that McCoy is safe from their potential tactics of persuasion?"

"Well, they will require a Human physician with the captives."

"Does Bones know what you were planning to do?"

"No, Captain. He thinks that I am a traitor." There was a certain bitterness in that last remark as Spock extricated himself from the bulkhead and stood up. "There, Captain. I can assume control of the ship at your command."

"Right, Spock, go - get us out of here."

As the ship moved off the red alert sounded.

Two or three minutes later the intercom buzzed. Kirk answered.

"C-Captain! How?"

"Uhura, by all that's wonderful!" responded Kirk; then recovering his composure, "Status?"

"Some of us have taken over Rec Room 3, Captain. We were waiting here to be transported to the planet. The movement of the ship threw the guards off balance. We knew one of our people had taken over Auxiliary because the Romulans were shouting about it over the intercom speakers."

"How many of you are there?"

"About forty. Scotty's here, and most of the engineers."

There was a rustling sound, then Scott's voice. "Captain Kirk, what a pleasure it is to hear you, sir. Just gie the orders and we'll endeavour to carry them out. By the way, Chekov, Sulu and McCoy are in the brig on the planet - they called the Romulans some things they oughtn't t'a done. We heard the guards talking."

"Scotty, I'm going to talk to the Romulans. When they're distracted, any chance of taking the bridge?"

"Just gie the word, Captain."

"Right, wait till you hear the beginning of my announcement. Spock, get us in phaser range of Remus. Aim all our phasers at that planet."

"Executing, sir."

"I wonder why the Romulans haven't tried to take control back from us?"

"The by-pass I rigged is quite complex, Captain. I do not think they know enough about the ship to do anything. The Enterprise is in position... now."

"Put me on ship-wide. Keep your fingers crossed, Spock."

"This is James T. Kirk, Captain of the USS Enterprise. I require that all Romulans on board surrender their arms now. We have phaser banks trained on Remus, and will destroy the planet if you do not comply."

He made a throat-cutting gesture, and Spock turned off the speakers.

"Spock, fire a ten-second burst, but don't hit anything important."

"Complying."

"Back on audio, please."

"That is to show we mean business." A gesture closed the speakers again.

"Let's give them a minute to discuss it. I wonder how Scott's getting on."

Seconds later the intercom buzzed, but it wasn't Scott, it was Lt. H'regar, Chief of Security.

"Captain, we have control of the shuttle deck - Mr. Scott set up a diversion."

"Now, Mr. Spock, time to talk to the Romulan Captain." He thumbed the intercom. "Captain Kirk to bridge."

"This is Commander T'Go'Ath, Kirk. Surrender your arms in the name of the Romulan Empire. I have here Captain Anstey; I will kill him if you do not surrender your person to me..."

His voice tailed off. There was the sound of a scuffle followed by the whine of a phaser. Then Scott's voice said, rather smugly,

"Bridge secure, Captain. You can come up now. And could Mr. Spock unhook his bypass circuits, please."

On the bridge everything was in remarkably good order. Three Romulan guards were being held at phaser point, T'Go'Ath was seated in the command chair. As Kirk walked onto the bridge the Romulan Commander spoke defiantly.

"You may have won the battle, Captain Kirk, but you have not won the war. You will be blasted out of the sky by the forces of the Praetor."

"Well, Commander, I'm capable of doing a bit of blasting of my own. Did you get the report of damage on the planet up here? I'm afraid my First Officer was a little too zealous. It seems we have laid waste the centre of a major conurbation."

The Commander's back stiffened and he turned pale.

Until that moment Bill Anstey had remained silent - in actual fact he was suffering from shock, and had started to believe in miracles - but Kirk's words were too much for his diplomatic soul.

"Really, Captain Kirk, this is too much! There are innocent civilians down there..."

Kirk was not slow in seizing the opportunity. "I don't care about innocent civilians. I only care about my ship. For every member of my crew who is harmed, a hundred will die on the planet. Commander, recall the shuttlecraft loaded with Enterprise personnel."

T'Go'Ath made no move to comply.

"Mr. Spock, realign phaser. Target as before."

"Understood, sir."

"Fire when ready - two ten-second bursts."

"No, wait!" T'Go'Ath was on his feet. "You must let me contact the Senate. I am a soldier, not a politician."

"If a soldier sent those shuttles out, a soldier can recall them. Do it."

Reluctantly the Commander issued the necessary order.

"Now I want the prisoners on the planet brought aboard."

"They are out of my jurisdiction, Kirk. Captain, as soon as the base realises what is happening, this vessel will be blasted out of the sky."

"Oh, don't they know, Captain?" It was Commander Scott who interrupted. "Captain, when we took over the rec room Uhura managed to put a scramble on communications by using the games computer. These laddies have been talking to the planet, but they've been talking nonsense."

Kirk looked thoughtful for a moment. "Mr. Spock, who interrogated you when you were first taken?"

"The Commander-General of the Fleet, T'Krall, Captain."

"Uhura, sort out that board. I wish to speak to T'Krall. Scotty, get H'regar to organise a reception for the shuttle crews."

"You're through to the base, Captain."

"Good day, Romulan base. I wish to speak to the Fleet Commander. This is Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise."

There was a short delay, then a cultured voice spoke in Standard with just the trace of an accent. "Congratulations, Captain Kirk. I must presume you are in control of the vessel. I should not have believed your young colleague Anstey when he said he was in command. We have been remiss in allowing you this much success."

Kirk thought it best not to enlighten the Romulan about his 'take-over'. "Commodore, I regret to inform you that I expect further success. At this moment our phasers are trained on Remus. We wish to leave without further bloodshed, but we will not leave without our fellow officers, who are in prison on Ri'Hanna."

"Further bloodshed, Captain? There has been no bloodshed. Your phaser crews are singularly bad shots."

At the Commodore's words Bill Anstey looked surprised, T'Go'Ath disgusted.

"Commodore, I intended to miss your cities. Next time, though, I will not miss."

"Oh, I don't think so, Captain Kirk. I have studied you and your culture. There is your Prime Directive - and your personal code of honour."

Kirk gritted his teeth; there were disadvantages to being known.

"Checkmate, Captain." Spock spoke gently and quietly. "A good try."

Suddenly an arm pushed Kirk aside. "Romulan, listen to me. I am Anstey. I'm no Kirk - I am not soft like he is. My finger is on the firing button now. I will not hesitate to fire."

"Captain Anstey, you were compliance itself when I spoke to you in person."

"I just wanted to get my hands on the ship, if necessary to crash the Enterprise onto the planet and blast it to nothing. My parents were killed by Romulans. Honour does not interested me; vengeance does. Send us back our officers now. I will press this button otherwise."

"How do I know you will not press it anyway?"

"You don't. You have to take that chance." Anstey switched off the comm unit.

Spock and Kirk exchanged glances, looking at Anstey's taut, rage-filled face. Then he turned to them and smiled.

"I can play the bastard too," he grinned.

Kirk patted him on the shoulder. "Right. We wait. Sixty seconds, then ask him what he is going to do... now.

"Well, Commodore, what is it to be? Return the hostages, or... oblivion?"

There was a pause. "You may beam them up in five minutes."

Kirk frowned. "They're playing for time. They could have just given us the coordinates." He put the transporter room on stand-by, with instructions to let him know the moment McCoy and the others were aboard.

"Spock, get ready to warp out of here. We'll get no second chance. Will you take the helm, Mr. Anstey."

"Aye aye, sir."

"Engine room, get ready. Full power on my word." As the minutes passed he drummed his fingers on the console, then as the transporter room called in, "Now!"

It was touch and go. Within minutes three Romulan ships came screaming after them.

"Shields up," said Kirk calmly. "Run for home. Mr. Scott?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Warp eight, Scotty. The alternative is annihilation."

"I'll do my best, sir, but..."

"She won't hold up for long. I know, Scotty, but we don't have long. Mr. Spock, please monitor the pursuit. Sickbay, this is the Captain. Report the condition of the hostages."

"McCoy here, Jim. We're fine - dirty, tired and hungry, but otherwise okay. Now how in hell did you get on board?"

"It's a long story, Bones. Hopefully, I'll get the change to tell it to you. At the moment we're trying to outrun the Romulans. Your reprieve might be short-lived."

"Jim-boy, do your best. I've no desire to go back to those green-blooded... Which reminds me - where's Spock?"

"He's here, Bones, safe and well."

"I'll bet he is. He agreed to work with them. Don't trust him, Jim."

"Bones, do you really believe that of him?"

"Well... no, but I couldn't figure out what he was playing at."

"We'll explain it later - with luck."

The whole bridge had heard the exchange. Spock remained hunched over his science console; to Kirk's practised eye the tips of his ears looked a slightly darker shade of green. Kirk went over to him and laid his hand briefly on his First Officer's shoulder.

"How are our pursuers doing?"

"Gaining, Captain, but we might just make it to the Neutral Zone."

"That won't save us." In his heart Kirk felt that his luck was about to run out.

Bill Anstey had heard and seen all. He felt he was missing something. He had heard McCoy's words to Spock on the planet, and his exchange with Kirk a few moments ago. He had seen - though not understood - Kirk's gesture to Spock. There seemed to be a sort of bond between the three, certainly a strong one between Kirk and Spock. He had heard about these two - everyone had, as they were practically legends, and the source of much gossip, both complimentary and uncomplimentary. However, he had assumed that many of the stories of their exploits were just media hype. It seemed now that they might be true. The three had been called miracle workers. Kirk's appearance on the bridge certainly seemed miraculous, and the two men seemed to work together without verbal contact. Anstey assumed that it was the result of long association.

His own performance over the last few days dismayed him. He was not ashamed, because he had done exactly what he thought right, but he could see now that lack of experience had impaired his judgement, and that he had been guilty of over confidence. He could see how efficient the Enterprise crew was - he had given them no credit for being time-served veterans. When he thought of his treatment of Spock, he went cold. The First Officer's motives for agreeing to work with the Romulans had become clear; his efficiency and devotion to duty were becoming clearer by the minute. Well, he

hoped he had regained some credibility by his part in what he now thought of as the 'Big Bluff'. God, he'd been completely taken in by Kirk's strategy at first. If he could not read Captain Kirk, how could he possibly ever read enemy commanders? At no stage had he been able to keep up with Kirk's thinking - and yet the rest of the bridge crew had seemed to know exactly what was happening.

His reverie was interrupted by the bridge doors opening to admit McCoy, Sulu and Chekov, the last sporting a bandage round his head.

"Permission to return to duty, Captain Kirk?" Chekov pointedly ignored Anstey.

"Permission granted. Gentlemen, to your stations. Keep your fingers crossed."

McCoy left, casting an uncomfortable glance at the Vulcan as he did so. However, Spock was too busy to notice.

"Captain!" Mr. Spock's voice, though soft, held an exclamation. "Three as yet unidentified vessels in Federation space on the edge of the Neutral Zone. The Romulan ships are gaining. We will enter neutral space in five point three minutes."

Kirk held his breath. Could it be that Lady Luck had listened to him one more time? He closed his eyes and wished. Spock looked quizzically at his Captain, then returned his perusal to his scanners.

"Captain, they are cruisers. If I am not mistaken, one is the Potemkin, an other the Abraham Lincoln." Spock sounded disappointed at his lack of precision.

"And the Romulans, Spock?"

"Slowing down, Captain. I do not think they are prepared to follow..." The rest of his words were drowned in a chorus of cheers.

Kirk unclenched his knuckles, which had been white with tension. "We've done it, Spock! We've done it - we're safe!"

Spock met Kirk's exuberance with his customary calm, though he too found it difficult to comprehend their sudden salvation when a few hours previously he had been contemplating certain death.

"Random factors do seem to have operated in our favour, Jim, although *you* 'did it', as you put it. This time the feat was... amazing."

Kirk sobered suddenly. "One of these times our luck really will run out. Are the Romulans still dropping back?"

"Yes, sir; they have cut engine speed considerably."

Kirk thumbed his intercom. "Mr. Scott, you can give your 'bairns' a rest at warp 6 now."

"Aye, Captain."

The Enterprise shot out of the Neutral Zone and ploughed a channel between the battlecruisers, who fell into formation behind

her.

"Helmsman, set course for Starbase 6. Mr. Spock, I have some explaining to do."

"Sir?"

"The shuttle. I borrowed it. I also borrowed a secret prototype cloaking device - that's how I got so close to Ri'Hanna. And I've lost both the shuttle and the device. Now the Romulans will copy the technology. I'm not going to be popular."

Spock did not reply. He could think of nothing comforting to say.

"Secure from General Quarters. Mr. Spock, form a relief rota of staff so that everyone can eat, then I would like to see you in my quarters in thirty minutes. Mr Anstey, I shall want to see you later also."

Whether Anstey was Captain-Designate or not, that was clearly an order. He did not demur.

When Spock entered Kirk's cabin the Captain had ordered a meal for them both. He had also watched the log records of the command test, and had formed his own conclusions.

"Sit down Spock. Brandy?"

To his surprise the Vulcan accepted. He was about to ask Spock for his side of the story when he was forestalled.

"You have viewed the log, Captain?"

Jim Kirk grinned. Spock knew him too well. "Yes, but I want to hear it from your point of view."

"What happened is my fault, Captain. I did not read Anstey properly. I behaved as though... you were on the bridge, and he misunderstood. He thought I was challenging him." To Kirk's eye, Spock looked really miserable.

"Nonsense, Spock. You behaved exactly as you should have done. Anstey behaved like a greenhorn. Nogura and Starfleet, however, behaved like cadets."

Kirk explained his troubles in obtaining information, and expressed his opinion of various Starfleet personnel in no uncertain terms. He went on to give Spock a detailed account of his own activities, including his appropriation of the shuttle and the cloaking device. He left out his sensing of Spock's predicament - in the cold light of reason he dismissed the perceptions as imagination born of worry.

Spock caught Kirk's gaze and held it. "Jim, how exactly did you know where we were?"

"Well, you were patrolling the Neutral Zone, and I... guessed... Hell, no I didn't. You told me - I think. I had a very strong sense that you were in trouble, which grew stronger the nearer I got to Ri'Hanna. It also never occurred to me to look

anywhere other than inside Romulan space, although I did not realise that until now. When I arrived on the Enterprise, I felt I knew you were in your cabin..." He tailed off, embarrassed. "It seems nonsense when it's put into words."

Spock was looking at him thoughtfully. "Jim, at one point I did attempt mind contact, an act of... desperation. I dismissed the attempt as irrational, the result of futile hope born of my Human half. But," his gaze shifted to the floor, "I frequently found myself analysing my part in our capture, and that involved... thoughts which might have kept a link open." Spock was clearly finding the explanation extremely difficult.

"I considered that I had failed your trust, and was... concerned that you would not know what had happened to the Enterprise." He looked at Kirk again. "To make mind contact over such a distance would be unusual even between pure telepaths. We have linked before, but my telepathic ability is based mainly on touch, and you, according to your records, are psi-null. I do not doubt that we achieved a link, therefore there must be something in us which channels our mental energies. I cannot say that I understand it, but I am proud that it exists. It would be... fascinating... to research the phenomenon."

The speech, a long one for Spock, had taken Kirk's breath away, and he did not reply immediately. The silence drew more words from Spock.

"Jim, I am sorry. I have embarrassed you."

"No, Spock. I'm awed by what you've said - by the fact of the link and the compliment you've just paid me. My friend, how can you blame yourself for misreading Anstey? And how could he not trust you?"

At the moment Kirk's door buzzer sounded. "Come."

Anstey walked in, but stopped when he saw Spock and the uneaten meal. There was something in the atmosphere, too. He hesitated. "Perhaps I should come back later?"

"No, we need to talk about what happened."

Kirk explained where he felt the faults lay. "Your contribution to the bluff at the end saved us, though. Look, Bill, you'll make a fine Captain - but not yet. You need more experience out here. I've looked at your record. Your experience of command has been on outpost stations - challenging, but not as unpredictable as a space posting. It's up to Commander Spock to write your report, but I will recommend that you are posted as a First Officer for a few years yet."

Anstey smiled. "I'm resigning, Captain Kirk. I could never act as you did out there. I'm going into the diplomatic service. Most of my work on Outpost 24 was diplomacy - stopping various races on shore leave and business from cutting each others' throats. To be a Starship Captain you appear to need to be a magician."

"There was no magic, Bill." Kirk filled Anstey in, but he could not explain the mind link with Spock - did not want to.

"Captain Kirk, what you have just described - that is magic."

Anstey smiled, stood up, and left.

As the door closed behind Anstey, Kirk's intercom paged him. It was Montgomery Scott, slightly the worse for alcohol.

"Jim, ye'll be verra pleased when I tell ye what I've got here."

"Yes, Scotty, what have you got there? A large pink elephant?"

Spock's eyebrows climbed into his hairline.

"Nay, laddie. Yon shuttle - the da Vinci. I forgot to mention it earlier. I found the wee lassie nestling under the Enterprise's primary hull while you and that Romulan laddie were arguing. Anyway, I slapped a tractor beam on her, then forgot about her in the excitement. I've stowed her for ye. 'Scuse me, Captain - someone's interferin' wi' ma whisky..." The communication ceased abruptly.

Kirk looked at Spock in disbelief. "How on earth did she stay with us?"

"I suppose, Captain, that when I moved the Enterprise she must have been pulled in our wake. Of course at that point the craft would have been cloaked, and so invisible to our sensors. However, the new cloaking device operates when the vehicle is stationary by drawing power from a specially designed zenium battery; this secondary source provides power for a very limited time. When the battery ceased to function the vessel decloaked, with the result that Mr. Scott described. If I may say so, Jim, random factors seem to have operated in your favour again."

Kirk nodded mutely. He did not wish to contemplate how much of his lifetime's allocation of luck he had used up on this mission. He must be due some hard times ahead... He shook off the morbid thought.

A little time later, having eaten at last, Kirk and Spock were talking quietly at ease when McCoy arrived.

"Sorry I couldn't get up here sooner. Once we'd stopped rushing around everyone found some little cut, bruise, cracked rib, or broken head to keep me busy." He did not add that he had been looking for the courage to apologise to Spock.

"Spock - I'm sorry about what I said on the planet. I guess I really didn't think it."

"No, Doctor," said Spock calmly. "You rarely think before you speak."

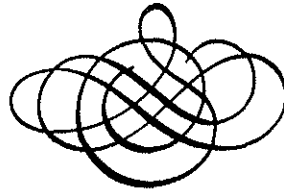
The voice was gentle with humour, but McCoy realised that he had hurt the Vulcan. He stuck out his hand. Spock hesitated, then clasped it.

The Doctor sank down into a chair, relieved. "Now, Jim, let's hear the whole story."

James T. Kirk sighed and wondered how often he was going to have to tell this tale.

POSTSCRIPT

William Anstey went into the diplomatic service. James T. Kirk paid no price for his appropriation of the shuttlecraft and cloaking device, except the tedium of a rather protracted enquiry. Privately Kirk thought - and Spock agreed - that Starfleet were too worried about what might make the press if they made an issue of the theft.



TRIBUTE TO SPOCK

To you, my friend, to whom I owe my most inner peace.
To your warmth, your kindness, your simple understanding.
To others you show only the acceptable face of Vulcan heritage;
yet to me you reveal the oneness of soul, the greatness
of generosity, that is beyond both pulls of nature,
that moreover is the base essence that is simply you.
I do not require Human behaviour. I wish only
That you remain - you.

Susan P. Keighley



KIRK



Thousands of miles he's travelled
Far out among the stars.
Parsecs past our planets
Jupiter and Mars.
He's loved and lost many women,
This 'Caesar of the Stars.'

Helen Connor

THE LETTER

by

Joyce Devlin

Amanda stared at the letter in her hand and wondered why her son was writing to her. Normally all Spock sent was a short, to-the-point stargram; however, this time it seemed like a lengthy letter - or perhaps it was one of his scientific papers.

Making herself a cup of coffee, Amanda settled down in an armchair to read whatever it was her son had written. She read it once, then again, unbelieving what her eyes were reading. She could just picture her son in the situation, and could not control a fit of the giggles, so that she did not hear Sarek come in.

"Amanda, control yourself!" he said sharply.

"My husband, you read this letter from our son and see if you can control yourself. I will make the dinner."

Amanda handed him the letter and escaped to the kitchen. She could feel his curiosity through the bond, and knew he was beginning to read. No, her husband was not as hard as he made himself out to be.

Sarek unfolded the letter, and began to read Spock's handwriting.

Dear Mother,

As Dr. McCoy is so fond of saying, it shouldn't happen to a Doctor, but somehow it always does. Only this time it happened to me. I still do not fully understand how or why, but I will endeavour to explain. However, I will have to adopt the good Doctor's manner to do so; it is the only way.

The Enterprise was on a routine planet survey when it happened. Jim and Dr. McCoy were planetside checking out the possibility of the planet being a source of the rare plant trill, which is the major ingredient in the making of trillion. All our computers had scanned the planet and found nothing to warn us of any danger. However, on reflection I should have known better than to allow Jim and McCoy to go off on their own; something always happens, and this time was no exception to the rule.

"Uhura," I asked, "is there anything from Captain Kirk?" I had asked that question ten times in the past ten minutes since entering the bridge.

"Nothing, Mr. Spock."

"Please keep trying to raise him."

"I dinna like it, Mr. Spock. It's no' like the Captain no' tae report in." Mr. Scott voiced my own worry, as it had been exactly an hour since beamdown.

I could contain myself no longer. "Mr. Chekov, do you still have a fix on them?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

"Relay their coordinates to the transporter room. I am going down."

"Is that wise, Mr. Spock? We dinna know what's what," Scott asked me.

"You have the con, Lieutenant-Commander."

I transported down, and believe me I received the biggest shock of my life. Jim and McCoy were all right, but I wasn't looking at my Captain any more, but at a six or seven year old boy. I knew instantly that it was Jim, but where was McCoy?

"Jim?" I said as I came to a stop under an apple tree.

"Hi, Spock."

My eyebrows had climbed to the top of my forehead. "Where is Dr. McCoy?" I asked.

"Up the tree," replied the child.

I looked up, and at that point McCoy dropped from the branch he had been sitting on onto my back.

"Giddy up, horsey! Come on, Spock, giddy up!" he yelled in my ear.

As I tried to disentangle myself I saw Jim, a look of mischief in his eyes as he lunged at me.

"Come on, Spock, play with us!" he yelled.

"Jim, what happened?" I asked as I managed to grab hold of him.

"Nothing." He shuffled his feet, looking at them.

Then I saw the apple cores. "Have you been eating the fruit from that tree?" I asked.

"Yes," came the innocent reply.

I took a deep breath and looked around. The planet resembled the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. At that moment my communicator buzzed.

"Mr. Spock, have ye found them?"

"Yes, Mr. Scott, I have. However, there is one small problem; the Captain and Dr. McCoy are not themselves."

"Do ye require assistance?"

"No, I can manage." I took Jim and McCoy each under an arm and had Mr. Scott beam us back to the ship.

Once aboard Scott looked at me in total amazement. "What the...?" he said as I put the two grubby boys down.

"This is Captain Kirk," I endeavoured to explain.

"Hi, Scotty." Jim looked at McCoy. "Come on, Bones, let's go."

"Wait," I commanded.

"Yes?"

"Where are you going?"

"To the bridge - where else?"

"Like that? I think not."

"What's up with us?" McCoy asked.

"For one thing, you need a bath."

"No we don't. We're not that bad." Jim looked at me.

"I'll leave ye to it, Mr. Spock," Scott said.

I took the two boys by the scruff of the neck down to sickbay, where I found Nurse Chapel.

"Christine, please help me," I said as I entered with the two.

"What have we got here? No, I don't believe it. Mr. Spock, it can't be."

"It is."

"What happened?"

"They both ate several of these." I handed her an apple.

She turned it over and looked at it before giving it back to me. "You had better have it analysed while I clean these two up and find them some clothes that will fit them. Come on, boys."

That was only the start of the trouble. For two whole weeks I had to keep the news from Starfleet Command while trying to keep the two horrors out of trouble, and believe me, it was difficult - very difficult. I have never felt more like tanning one boy's backside in particular, and I ended up doing just that - and on the bridge.

Where they had got hold of a can of cream I do not know, but to have them playing at Cowboys and Indians on the bridge was not on. I finally lost my temper with Jim after getting the cream in my eye; I grabbed him and put him over my knee in front of the whole bridge crew.

"Spock, no! Please!" he yelled as I spanked his backside hard.

It was at that moment, of course, that the chemical responsible for the transformation wore off, and Jim transformed back while still over my knee. I do not know who received the biggest shock, Jim, McCoy or myself, but I do know that Jim could not sit down very comfortably for several hours.

At one point, as he eased himself down into the command chair, he asked, "Was I honestly that bad, Spock?"

I did not have the chance to reply as the rest of the bridge crew answered in unison, "Yes!"

"If it hadna been for Spock, sir, I'd ha tanned yer hide long before he did, especially when I caught ye trying tae feed ma bairns ice cream."

"I didn't... did I?"

"Yes, Captain, you did, but I caught Mr. Scott just in time."

"How come you...?"

"Well, Keptin, you covered Mr. Spock in cream," Chekov replied.

"I didn't!"

"You did."

"I guess I deserved everything I got, then?"

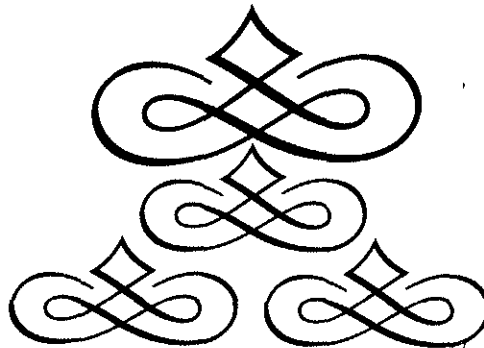
"Aye, and more."

So there you have it, Mother. We are still trying to identify the chemical responsible - the "apple" was a fascinating mass of readings new to me - and I am still trying to reconcile myself to having spanked a senior officer.

Live long,

Spock

Amanda smiled. Through the bond she could feel Sarek's amusement. She was right - he had not ben able to control himself.



FOR VULCAN

by

Teresa Abbott

Pain tore through Spock, taking his breath away and making him stagger and fall heavily against the metal wall of the passageway.

No warning.

No explanation.

Spock knew that he cried out even as his nails dug deep into his palms in a vain attempt to regain control. An eternity seemed to pass before he could force the sensations down to a bearable level, and he knew then an even greater terror as he realised that the pain was not within him, but outside.

Sick with fear, he stumbled along the corridor to the turbolift, not even able to imagine what could cause such agony and oblivious of the stares of the people he pushed blindly from his path. Inside the lift he sagged back against the wall as the machine started its interminable upward crawl.

Spock had left the bridge barely minutes ago. Everything had been well. No alert had sounded since his departure. He tried to focus his mind on his link with Kirk, but the pain he was receiving blotted out all rational thought, and he could only wait, dry-mouthed with the expectation of what he would find, until the lift finally deposited him on the bridge.

And everything there was normal.

The bridge crew worked diligently at their stations, the computers hummed with their usual quiet efficiency, and the forward screen showed an untroubled starscape before them.

Half falling out of the lift, Spock was vaguely aware of a sea of faces turning to him in shocked surprise. The Captain was getting up and walking towards him, eyes clouded with concern. Spock grasped Kirk's arms tightly and knew he was shaking with relief.

"Jim!" It was an effort to speak. "Jim, I thought..."

He wanted to say more, but the pain finally became unbearable, and mercifully the darkness began to close in around him as he fought desperately to stay conscious, and to Control.

"Spock!"

Kirk turned in the command chair, surprised to see his First Officer back on the bridge so soon after the end of his shift. His heart seemed to stop for a moment as he saw at once that something was very wrong. Getting up, he moved quickly towards the Vulcan, and was surprised to find himself caught in a vice-like grip.

"Jim!" The emotion in Spock's voice tore at Kirk's heart. "Jim, I thought..." The Vulcan faltered, but the anguish and fear were clearly visible in his eyes.

Knowing how the Vulcan would deplore such an outward show of emotion if he were well, Kirk quickly steered his friend back into the turbolift, away from the concerned but nevertheless curious eyes of the crew.

"Sulu, take over. Uhura, warn McCoy." He barked out the orders as the lift doors slid shut behind them.

Alone with Spock, the mask of command slipped from him instantly, and he was only a deeply worried friend. "Spock!" Gently he shook the Vulcan, and noted with fear that Spock no longer seemed to know him. The Vulcan's face looked older somehow, pain-drawn, and his eyes appeared to be locked on some point beyond Kirk's shoulder as he muttered something incomprehensible in Vulcan.

The door slid open at their destination, and helping Spock out of the lift Kirk had never been more grateful to see McCoy already coming up the corridor towards them.

The Doctor, as usual at his best in an emergency, took the Vulcan's other arm, and between them they had Spock in sickbay in a matter of minutes. McCoy remained expressionless as he checked and re-checked the diagnostic indicators, and then finally administered a sedative. Only then did he turn to the Captain, and notice Kirk's ashen face.

"For Chrissakes, Jim, sit down before you fall down!" Gently pushing Kirk into a chair, he sat down opposite him. "Tell me what happened."

Briefly Kirk told McCoy of the scene on the bridge. It helped to talk, making it easier to come to terms with the speed at which the situation had developed.

"I had the impression that Spock thought I had been hurt," he finished. "It was as if he was relieved to find me well. But why would he think that? We'd been together barely minutes before."

McCoy looked at Kirk thoughtfully. Sometimes he felt that he understood his two friends better than they did themselves. "All indications are that Spock's in a lot of pain, but there's nothing physically wrong with him. His first reaction must have been to assume that the pain was yours. Since you are obviously well, it seems that he's receiving a telepathic sensation from elsewhere."

Kirk was stunned. "But where from? Who else would he pick up from? Sarek? Amanda? He *might* feel their deaths, or their distress, but surely not to this extent."

McCoy hesitated. "How about T'Pring? It's said that the severance of a Vulcan mating bond can cause extreme distress."

Kirk shook his head. "No, Doctor. Spock's assured me that that bond was completely terminated a long time ago. The only other time Spock has seemed in pain like this was when the *Intrepid* was destroyed. But even that, with all of its crew, caused only a momentary sensation. There are no other ships manned entirely by Vulcans."

"Not a ship!"

Kirk and the Doctor were both startled by the whisper from the bed. Spock had opened his eyes, and Kirk hoped never again to see such bleak despair in them. Involuntarily he took a step forward.

"Spock, lie quiet. We're doing what we can."

The Vulcan's eyes locked with his, and Kirk could not tear himself away from the anguish in them. "Not a ship, Jim. It is Vulcan."

Kirk's eyes snapped up in disbelief and met the equally horrified eyes of the Doctor.

Simultaneously, the red alert sounded throughout the ship.

Kirk was back in the bridge within minutes. He had been assured by McCoy that there was nothing he could do to help Spock, and his ship obviously had the greater need of him, but still it was difficult to leave sickbay.

Stepping out of the turbolift, Kirk immediately sensed the suppressed tension in the air. Taking over from Sulu he sat in the command chair and resolutely refused to look over at the science station. After a moment he swivelled round to face Uhura, and saw the unspoken question in her eyes.

"Mr. Spock will be all right." He said it as much to reassure himself as the bridge crew, knowing he had no concrete evidence on which to base the statement. "Status?"

Uhura hesitated. "All Federation ships are on general alert, and a Code Factor One message is to follow shortly."

Kirk tensed. He could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times a Code Factor One message had been broadcast. Always it heralded a disaster of galaxy-wide proportions. Last time it had been Lazarus who had been condemned to eternal hell. And this time? Spock's whispered words echoed remorselessly through his brain.

Kirk's thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of the Starfleet Commander on the screen. Admiral Robson's face was drawn, and as he spoke it was as if even he disbelieved the words he was saying.

"Enterprise. There's no easy way to tell you this. I have to inform you that the planet Vulcan has disappeared."

Kirk leaned back heavily in his chair, and for once the shock showed clearly in his face. Spock's words had prepared him for something, but never had he expected this.

Oh Spock, he thought with compassion, *no wonder...* Aloud, he said, "You mean the planet has somehow been destroyed?"

The Admiral shook his head. "No, Captain, it has simply... vanished... from our galaxy, as if it had never existed. We would have expected some residue from an explosion, and a distortion of space even if it were somehow moved. However, there is nothing. If

a weapon has been used it is obviously vastly superior to anything the Federation possesses, and we are powerless against it. Any of our planets could be vulnerable at any time.

"All ships and planetary defence systems have been activated as a precaution, but it seems unlikely that we can protect ourselves. Your orders are to stay alert, report anything unusual, and we will be in touch again as soon as our investigations turn up anything positive."

"One moment, sir," Kirk interrupted as the Admiral was about to break contact. "My First Officer, Mr. Spock, is from Vulcan, and seems to be in some physical distress because of this incident."

The Admiral sighed wearily. "Consider yourself lucky, Kirk, that he is only half Vulcan. Many Vulcans away from their planet have either died or fallen into comas from which we cannot revive them. Again, I'm afraid you'll have to stand by pending further investigations. Starfleet out."

Kirk closed his eyes as the screen went blank. His conscious mind had heard the message, but his subconscious refused to accept it. Around him he could hear the shocked whisperings of the crew, and knew that as always they would look to him for guidance. This time, he could find no words of comfort to give them. He knew that Sarek and Amanda had been on Vulcan, together with many of Spock's family and acquaintances. Over the years he himself had come to think of the planet as his second home.

And the loss to the Federation was incalculable.

If the news hurt *him* like this, how must it be for Spock? Kirk wondered how he would feel if Earth had disappeared. He could not even begin to imagine his own grief. After a moment he stood, and swallowed hard against the tightness in his throat.

"Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Maintain red alert, and let me know immediately if you find anything. I'll be in sickbay."

He ignored the startled looks of the bridge crew as he headed for the turbolift. He knew that as Captain he should really remain on the bridge while a Code Factor One emergency was operating. With no visible, immediate danger, however, he was achieving nothing by staying. Spock, on the other hand, would have need of him.

On entering sickbay Kirk was dismayed to find the Vulcan still on the diagnostic couch, although Spock was obviously calmer and seemed more aware of his surroundings. It was obvious from Spock's face that he had heard the message, and Kirk was ashamed of his own relief that he didn't have to be the one to break the news.

"I'm sorry, Spock." As he said the words he knew how hopelessly inadequate they sounded. Instinctively he reached out to the Vulcan, then stopped the Human gesture, sensing how pitifully fragile his friend's control really was. He dreaded asking the next question, but it could not be avoided.

"Are they all dead, Spock? Do you have any idea what has happened to them?"

A spasm of pain crossed the Vulcan's face, and he closed his eyes. To Kirk's surprise, the Doctor stepped protectively between them.

"Leave him alone, Jim. Spock's in no condition to be questioned."

Kirk flinched at the harshness in McCoy's voice, too upset to realise that it only masked the Doctor's own grief. Did McCoy really think him insensitive to what Spock was going through? But someone had to remain in command, and carry on, despite their own sorrow.

Ignoring McCoy, Kirk spoke directly to the Vulcan. "Forgive me, Spock. I don't mean to intrude on your grief, but other planets may be in danger. I'll be on the bridge. Call me if you feel able to talk."

He waited, hoping for some sign that the Vulcan had heard him, but there was nothing. If they had been alone he would have tried again, feeling that the man suffering behind the outward mask needed him now more than ever. With McCoy standing guard over the patient, however, he did not want to risk another confrontation. Angry and upset, he turned and left sickbay.

For 24 hours the Enterprise hung motionless in space. Tension aboard the ship increased with each passing hour. After the initial shock and disbelief had come fear, each race for its own homeworld; following that had come anger at whoever, or whatever, had caused the situation. In the absence of anything concrete against which to vent that anger, there were the inevitable flare-ups amongst the crewmembers.

After the first few hours, despite Starfleet recommendations to the contrary, Kirk ordered a drop in status from red to yellow alert. He considered his crew to be one of the best, if not *the* best, in Starfleet, but even they could not remain poised at 100% efficiency indefinitely.

The change to yellow alert had the necessary calming effect, and the extensive research and investigation procedures organised by the heads of departments did much to alleviate the general feeling of helplessness. Apart from that there was nothing they could do but wait for something to happen, in common with all the other Federation Starships.

Kirk hadn't seen Spock since his visit to sickbay. He knew from McCoy that the Vulcan had been discharged and was resting in his rooms, having requested some time to be alone. The Captain felt obliged to grant the request, although as the hours passed he became increasingly concerned. It was unlike Spock to hide away from reality.

Several times Kirk had reached for the intercom switch, needing to talk to his friend, but each time he had stayed his hand, not wanting to force his company on Spock too soon. Apart from the fact that Kirk considered it unhealthy for Spock to spend so much time brooding alone, there was also the fact that they needed the Vulcan on the bridge. With the Federation investigations turning up nothing, and many top Federation scientists being incapacitated due to their Vulcan origins, Kirk felt that Spock's mind was needed now more than ever to try to shed some light on the mystery of an entire

planet's disappearance.

After 24 hours Kirk's patience ran out. He made his way to Spock's quarters, but received no answer to several requests for entry. Exasperated, he knocked on the door.

"Spock, I know you're in there. If you don't open the door I'll use the override and come in anyway."

He waited, holding his breath while the seconds ticked by. Just as he was beginning to think that Spock would call his bluff the door slid open.

Stepping into the room Kirk was immediately aware of the change in the atmosphere. The room was cold, and looked stark and desolate. Shocked, Kirk realised that the Vulcan flame no longer burned in the firepot, and without its comforting glow the room looked inhospitable and barren.

Spock sat with his back to him on the bed in the alcove, and his voice was cold. "Go away, Jim. Leave me alone. I don't need your interference."

Kirk hesitated, then decided that all the years of friendship were worth a rebuff. "Please, Spock, don't shut me out. I only want to help. And the crew all understand what you must be feeling, and want to help too, in their own way."

The Vulcan stood, but did not turn round, and his voice was flat and toneless. "I repeat, I don't need you or your misplaced sympathy and meddling, and I certainly don't need any help from the crew."

Kirk felt the stirrings of anger than, but did not allow it to rise, still making allowances for Spock's behaviour because of the circumstances. He tried again, desperate to lighten the sombre atmosphere.

"If you don't need our sympathy, then at least come and help us on the bridge. There's no absolute proof that Vulcan is destroyed. With your help we might be able to do something positive."

Kirk waited, hoping for some answer, then suddenly noticed with compassion that the Vulcan's shoulders were shaking. Dismayed that his friend should break down like this, he moved forward impulsively, and taking Spock by the shoulders turned his friend gently round towards him...

... then stepped back with a shiver of horror as he realised that the Vulcan was not crying, but laughing.

"Go away, Jim. What makes you think I want Vulcan back? For the first time in my life I'm really, truly free, and you ask me to help put back the chains? I want nothing to do with Vulcan, and would stop you too if I thought you had a serious chance of finding it!"

Appalled, Kirk reached out again to his friend, gripping the Vulcan's arms and shaking him hard. "Spock, stop it! You don't know what you're saying! You can fight this madness..."

... and then his mind was slipping downwards, falling, falling, sucked down towards an insanity from which he knew he could not protect himself. Using reserves of power he didn't know he possessed he held back somehow from the brink, and knew then that the strength that held him was not all his own. After an eternity he opened his eyes and found that he was sitting on the bed, still holding the Vulcan, who sat next to him with long shudders racking his body.

Kirk lifted his eyes, then, to meet the Vulcan's, which for this moment at least were sane, and understood that from somewhere the Vulcan half of Spock had come back to control the involuntary link, and to shield him.

"Forgive me, Jim." Spock's whisper was strained. "I did not mean that to happen. I was not mentally prepared."

Kirk swallowed hard and tried unsuccessfully to smile. He wanted to say so much, but sensed that Spock's control was fragile, and dared not waste any time.

"My fault, Spock. I should have thought before holding you like that. But now that we have this time together, do you understand what has happened?"

The Vulcan closed his eyes. "They are not dead, Jim. I would know if they were. But they are too far away to be of any help. Please, Jim, you must let me go."

Stubbornly Kirk tightened his grip, knowing that Spock had only rallied to protect his Captain, and that once the contact between them was broken the Vulcan would have no reason to fight so hard against the insanity.

"Don't turn me away, Spock. Use my strength. We can fight this thing together..."

But before he could guess Spock's intentions the Vulcan had wrenched Kirk's hands from his arms and stood up abruptly to move across the room.

Defeated, Kirk's shoulders sagged as he realised that he could do nothing more at this time. The Vulcan now stood with his back to him as though carved from stone, and Kirk dared not approach him again and jeopardise his fight for control.

Quietly he got up and left the room, and only when he was outside did he allow himself to lean against the wall for a moment, emotionally drained and feeling sick inside at the knowledge of the mental battle the Vulcan would now have to face alone.

Kirk went straight to see McCoy.

The Doctor was at his desk in his office, making steady progress through a bottle of Scotch, and glanced up annoyed at the intrusion as the Captain strode unannounced into the room.

Kirk sat down facing him, tight-lipped and furious, and wasted no time on pleasantries. "What's the matter with Spock?"

The Doctor looked up at his friend, saw the anger, and retreated behind his drink. "There's nothing wrong with Spock," he began defensively.

The Captain reached out and removed the bottle, placing it at the far end of the table. "Cut it out, McCoy. Don't waste my time. I allowed Spock leave of absence from the bridge on compassionate grounds, on the understanding that you were monitoring his health. Are you trying to tell me you haven't noticed anything unusual in his behaviour?"

McCoy sighed. "Jim..." he started, then decided that attack was the best form of defence. "How am I supposed to know what's wrong with Spock? There's no precedent for this kind of situation. How are any of us supposed to know how grief will affect a person?"

Kirk was impatient. "This isn't normal grief, Bones, and you know it. He's illogical, erratic. Worse even than when he was in pon farr. He says he wants nothing to do with Vulcan, and isn't interested in finding out what happened to his planet. Do you consider that normal behaviour? You're the Doctor, you're supposed to have some explanation."

McCoy spread his hands helplessly. "Jim, I don't know. All the other Vulcans remaining in our galaxy are either dead or comatose. We have to assume that Spock's Vulcan half isn't functioning either. I grant you that if Earth were destroyed we would probably carry on, but Vulcans are far more dependant on their homeworld, and are linked to it in a way we can't understand. We already know that it controls their mating urge, and there are even rumours that the very souls of the elders remain on the planet after death. It may be that without their homeworld they just can't function. Either that, or the physical pain caused by its removal has been too much for them to bear. But either way, this is all just speculation."

Kirk leaned back and wearily rubbed his eyes. "All right. I can accept that. But why doesn't his Human half take over? He seems less Human now than before."

The Doctor sighed and leaned forward to retrieve his drink. Kirk didn't stop him.

"Jim, I saw him on Sarpeidon removed from Vulcan influence, but this is different. Without Vulcan he hasn't become totally Human, but effectively half of nothing. In a universe with no Vulcan in it a half-breed like him shouldn't exist, technically. That he's functioning at all says much about his incredible stamina and strength of mind. I don't know for how much longer he'll be able to carry on like this."

Kirk was appalled. "You're saying that this will gradually get worse? That eventually he'll become completely..." he held back from saying out loud the word insane "...mentally unstable?"

The Doctor had no answer for him. They sat in silence, each trying to find a way to come to terms with the situation.

Finally Kirk spoke. "He says the people of Vulcan are still alive. If that's the case, it's up to us to find them."

McCoy looked up at him in disbelief. "Jim, you can't believe what Spock tells you in his present state. He's irrational, prone

to fantasies..."

"No, Bones." Kirk cut him off. "This is different. I told him, begged him to fight this thing, and for a second or two he was himself." Kirk gave an involuntary shudder at the memory; the Doctor saw the pain in his Captain's face, but wisely didn't comment. "If Spock says that the Vulcans are alive, I believe him."

The Doctor stared at him. "How do you intend to set about finding a whole planet? The Federation is investigating all the obvious solutions. Even if the planet hasn't been destroyed it could have been moved into an alternate universe, another dimension, another time, anywhere! The scientists haven't found anything. You can't do the impossible, even if you do want to move mountains single-handedly to save Spock."

Kirk was silent, but the Doctor could see the stubborn determination in his friend's face, the refusal to give up. And as he watched he could almost see Kirk make that intuitive leap that had saved them all so many times before.

The Captain looked up at him with sudden conviction. "We must ask for help."

"Sorry?" McCoy was confused. "I don't follow you. Ask *who* for help?"

"Bones, if the Federation can't come up with anything, it's because our scientific knowledge doesn't extend to moving planets. But in our travels we've met many races whose level of achievement is vastly superior to ours - the Thasians, the Metrons, the Melkotians, to name but a few. They must be able at least to tell us what has happened to Vulcan."

McCoy was incredulous. "Jim, those races have no reason to help us. Most of them have actively tried to destroy us, and those that haven't made it clear that they consider us so primitive as to be irrelevant."

The Captain refused to admit defeat. "What about the Organians? They've shown an interest in our galaxy. I know it was mainly self-interest, wanting to prevent combat that might adversely affect their space, but the fact remains that they have interfered and prevented violence in a large part of our galaxy for several years. They exist on so many different levels from us that they must at least know what has happened to Vulcan."

The Doctor was worried by the weakness of Kirk's reasoning. "Jim..."

But the Captain would not be put off. He spoke with quiet desperation. "Bones, I've got to do *something*. I can't just sit here and watch Spock gradually losing his mind. Even if it comes to nothing it's better than waiting here, listening to the grinding of the wheels of Federation bureaucracy. Can't you understand that?"

The Doctor looked at his friend, and saw that the Captain would not be dissuaded. Pushing his drink away, he stood up. "I'll come with you to the bridge."

Gratefully Kirk smiled, acknowledging the support with his eyes, and together they left sickbay, both aware that they were

clutching at straws.

Several hours later McCoy stood on the bridge of the Enterprise and admitted to himself that he had been wrong to have misgivings about Kirk's plan. Even if it all came to nothing, the effect on the morale of the entire crew was incalculable.

Only McCoy and the Captain knew of the lengthy - and sometimes heated - negotiations that had taken place before Starfleet Command had agreed with Kirk's request to proceed to Organia. For once the Doctor agreed with the Captain that Command's reluctance to go ahead stemmed more from wounded pride than from logic. It didn't come easily to Starfleet Command to ask for help from races outside Federation jurisdiction.

There was also the very real objection that in reality little was known about the Organians and their culture, and it might not be safe to assume that all their motivations were good.

Eventually, however, the Enterprise was given permission to try and make contact, but to proceed cautiously at all times, and not to make any promises in exchange for information.

The Captain was elated. At last they were doing something positive. The mood of renewed optimism sped throughout the ship, and even Scott did not object to pushing the Enterprise to Organia at maximum warp.

Now the planet lay beneath them, the embodiment of all their hopes.

McCoy stood and watched the interplay between the bridge crew members, listened to scanning and communications reports, and marvelled again at the special gift Kirk had for drawing the best out of his crew. Then unintentionally the Doctor caught the Captain's eyes for a moment across the space that separated them, and his heart sank at the bleak despair in them.

The Doctor knew the reason only too well. An hour ago Spock had finally lapsed into a semi-conscious state, and was now in sickbay under restraints, alternating between periods of lucidity and spells of violent delirium. McCoy would not admit it even to himself, but it seemed the Vulcan was losing his fight to remain sane, and the Doctor knew that it was that knowledge that was eating away at Kirk.

The minutes crawled by depressingly. Another negative sensor scan. Still no sign of life on the planet. No answer on any frequency from Communications. If the Organians were there they were certainly not showing themselves.

Exasperated, Kirk stood up. "Sulu, take over. I'll be in my quarters. Notify me of any change in our scans, however slight. McCoy, with me."

He turned for the turbolift, and the Doctor followed him unhappily, hoping that from somewhere he would find the ability to fill Spock's shoes and give the necessary advice.

Kirk paced his cabin. "I know they're down there, Bones. If not actually on the planet, then in the vicinity. Why won't they

answer? If we fired on a Klingon ship they'd be here soon enough, so why not respond to a direct request to communicate?" He couldn't keep the bitterness from his voice. Then that which was really bothering him broke through, and stopping his pacing he sat down and reluctantly met the Doctor's eyes.

"How is he?" There was no need to specify who he referred to.

McCoy had never lied to Kirk before, and found it difficult now to return his gaze. "He's holding his own. Not getting any better, but... Jim, perhaps you should go and see him, talk to him again."

Kirk resisted the temptation. "No. I'm no good to him in sickbay. I know you're trying to cushion the blow, but I'm not blind, and I can see the way things are going. At the moment the best way I can help him is to try and carry this plan through to completion. If it all comes to nothing, there'll be time then to be with Spock." *Unless he dies. Please don't let him die!* he begged silently.

McCoy spoke slowly, trying to feel his way to the kind of advice that Spock would have given. "Jim, I'm not trying to discourage you, but we don't know for sure that the Organians are even on this planet. We only call this place Organia because it's where we first encountered them. Surely beings with no physical forms or physical requirements could be anywhere in the galaxy?"

Kirk was stubborn. "I can't accept that, Bones. This is the planet they evolved from. It must have some special meaning for them. Perhaps..." Kirk looked at McCoy warily, knowing that the Doctor would not approve of what he was going to say next. "Perhaps if we threatened to destroy the planet, or maybe just fired our phasers at it, they would be forced to appear to prevent the violence."

McCoy was horrified. "Jim, you can't do that! Starfleet orders were to proceed cautiously. Attacking the Organians' planet is hardly diplomatic. And what about the Prime Directive?"

Kirk brushed the objections aside. "You can't violate the Prime Directive on a planet where there are apparently no sentient life forms. It's worth a try, even if it just stops the Organians hiding from our sensor scans."

McCoy tried again. "But Jim..."

Kirk got up impatiently. "My mind's made up, Bones. Command decision. The responsibility will be mine alone. Are you coming?"

For the second time in an hour the Doctor had no choice but to tail along miserably behind his Captain.

The atmosphere on the bridge was electric.

As the turbolift doors slid open Kirk took in at a glance the tense, watchful postures of the bridge crew, and the solitary figure standing imposingly in front of the viewing screen.

Ayelborne looked the same now as he had the last time Kirk had seen him, not a day older, but this time his voice was cold and he wasn't smiling. "Come in, Captain. I have been waiting for you."

Kirk moved slowly down to the command chair, sparing only a brief glance at Uhura, who looked back apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Captain," she whispered. "He wouldn't let me page you."

Kirk nodded his understanding, and stopping by his chair faced the Organian cautiously. He was painfully aware that a great deal rested on how he handled the next few minutes. Forcing himself to relax, he smiled a welcome.

"Ayelborne! I'm glad you've come. We've been trying to contact..."

The Organian cut in coldly. "Spare me your small talk, Captain. We know why you have come, and what you threatened to do if we did not answer you. I am here to prevent you harming my homeworld, but will not help you otherwise. You know very well how interference in others' affairs disgusts us."

Kirk took a deep breath, knowing that this time, above all others, he must not allow himself to get angry. He had told the Organians at their last meeting that he was a soldier rather than a diplomat, but in the intervening years he had learned a fair measure of diplomacy. Carefully, he began to talk.

"Ayelborne, you say that interference in other races' affairs disgusts you, yet your people interfere on a daily basis between us and the Klingons. You said at our last meeting that as you stood on Organia, so you could simultaneously stand on the homeworlds of the Federation and the Klingon Empire. If you truly possess such powers, you must at least know what has happened to the planet Vulcan. Is not the taking of an entire planet a far greater act of violence than anything the Federation has ever attempted? If Vulcan has been overwhelmed by some natural phenomenon, so be it. But if a weapon has been used, how in logic can you prevent the Klingons from attacking us, but not another race?

"And there is a real danger to yourselves here. Without the stabilising, peaceful influence of the Vulcans, the Federation will shortly become more warlike. Already the heads of our governments are planning military strategies to face this unknown danger. Your planet will inevitably be caught up in the resulting warfare."

The Organian smiled grimly. "You speak a measure of logic, Captain, but overlook the risk to ourselves if we assist you. Our abilities are vastly superior to yours, but even we cannot move planets. If some such race exists, it could be as much a danger to us as to the Federation."

The Captain refused to be put off. "All the more reason why you should help us. If what you say is true, then your planet could also be at risk, and the peace you so crave to follow your own lifestyles might be violently disrupted. I ask only that you use your abilities to tell us what has happened to Vulcan. My First Officer says that his people are not dead, and there's the possibility that if we know where they are, we might be able to devise a way to save them."

The Organian closed his eyes, as though communicating with an outside voice, and when he opened them again his face was resigned.

"You use our own ethics against us, Captain. I will return to

my fellow Organians, and we will investigate. Beam down shortly to the planet, and we will meet you and discuss our findings. But remember, we do not promise to help you."

And he was gone.

With his departure Kirk was aware for the first time of the flood of adrenalin in his veins, and sat down shakily in the command chair.

McCoy came to stand anxiously beside him. "Jim, you're not seriously thinking of beaming down to Organia alone?"

The Captain glanced at him impatiently. "Of course I am. This isn't a game we're playing. We've set the whole thing in motion and must see it through." His voice softened as he saw the very real fear in his friend's eyes. Getting up, he clasped the Doctor's shoulder.

"Bones, don't worry. The Organians are a peace-loving race. Just look after Spock for me, and I'll be back as soon as I can. I'll pick up some things from my room, and you can meet me in the transporter room to see me off."

He glanced over at the helm. "Sulu, take over." With a last reassuring smile at the Doctor he made for the lift, and only when he was inside did he allow himself to lean back wearily against the wall.

Briefly he debated whether he could spare the time to go and see the Vulcan before beaming down, but decided against it. Time was of the essence, and the sooner he returned with the Organian findings, the sooner the possibility that Spock could be helped. It went against Kirk's deepest instincts to leave without seeing his friend, but he was not one to delude himself, and knew that the Vulcan, in his present condition, would either not know him or not want to see him. He also had no doubts that the old Spock would have understood his actions.

In his room Kirk quickly changed, re-checked his phaser, and rejected the impulse to look through his personal safe. There was no reason to suppose this mission to be any more dangerous than any other. Deciding that the Organians had probably had long enough to complete their investigations - they did, after all, function on a different level from Humans - he headed for the door of his cabin just as the intercom bleeped.

Snapping down the switch, he heard McCoy's anxious voice filtering through the speaker. "Jim, Spock's gone. He's broken his restraints, and is somewhere on the ship. Apparently your talk with Ayelborne was heard throughout the ship, and whatever Spock heard he didn't like."

Kirk frowned. "He'll probably head for the transporter room. He said before that he would try to stop any attempt to recover Vulcan. Get Security down there, and tell them I'm on my way."

Anxiously, he made again for the door. If this were any other time he would have said that the Vulcan's actions were a result of his concern for his Captain's well-being. As it was, he doubted whether Spock was now driven by any such noble motives.

The door slid open, but Kirk found himself unable to leave the

room. The Vulcan stood in the entrance, barring the way, and in his eyes was a desperate insanity that Kirk had never seen before.

For the first time in as long as he could remember, Kirk felt real fear: for himself, because he knew he could not allow the Vulcan to stop him in this; for Spock, who seemed to be slipping further and further away from his real self; but most of all for their friendship, which had taken so many years to build, and which he would have given his life for, and which now he would have to risk destroying.

"Let me pass, Spock." Kirk's voice was ominously quiet, and there were few who would disobey him in such a mood.

The Vulcan stood his ground. "You are not going down to that planet!"

Inwardly Kirk groaned. This was going to be harder than he had anticipated. Deliberately he softened his approach. "It's necessary that I go, Spock. If you were completely well you'd understand. You'd also know that it's for your sake, more than anyone's, that I'm doing this."

For a second something like confusion flickered over the Vulcan's impassive features, but was soon gone, to be replaced by the same determined inflexibility. Spock's voice was cold. "I will not permit it."

The Captain looked at his friend's tormented eyes, and knew in that instant that logical debate was not going to win this argument. Carefully he took a step back into the room, and straightening, pulled the invisible aura of command around himself. He spoke slowly and deliberately.

"Mr. Spock, I am the Captain of this ship, and as such your superior officer. I am ordering you to step aside."

Kirk's hopes that Spock would respond instinctively to the tone of command were quickly dashed. The Vulcan only smiled, and moved further into the room. There was an air of casual insolence about him.

"And if I don't?"

Without hesitation Kirk crossed to his desk. He too was angry now, not at Spock, but at the circumstances that had made the Vulcan change like this. He snapped down the intercom button. "Kirk to Sec..."

The blow hit him full on the side of the head and caused him to stagger and fall heavily against the cupboard in the corner. Shocked, but not totally surprised by the violence, he wiped the blood from his eyes as it seeped from the gash in his head, and tried shakily to stand.

He couldn't bring himself to fight the Vulcan physically over this, as he didn't consider Spock responsible for his actions, but the phaser still lay on his desk, and it was set to stun.

"Spock, please, there's no need for this." He kept talking to distract the Vulcan, then made a lunge for the phaser.

The second blow was harder than the first, and when the haze of

pain had subsided Kirk knew he was lying face down on the floor of his cabin. He could sense the Vulcan standing over him and lay absolutely still, feigning unconsciousness, knowing that another blow like that would probably kill him.

After what seemed like an eternity he heard Spock's footsteps retreating, and the sliding of the door. Only then did he pull himself up painfully to his knees and reach for the intercom on his desk.

"Kirk to Security. Find and detain Mr. Spock, but don't harm him. Dr. McCoy to my cabin."

Then at last he gave way to the pain in his head and slumped in his chair, as exhausted emotionally as physically. Outwardly he tried to remain calm, but inwardly he wept for what had happened to his friend.

The Captain and the Doctor caught up with Spock in the transporter room. The security guards had detained the Vulcan there, fortunately before he had time to do any damage to the machinery.

Spock stood between two security guards, and the Captain knew that had it not been for a further two guards with their phasers levelled ready to fire, the Vulcan would not have allowed himself to be taken.

Kirk faced Spock across the room, and the naked hatred in his once-friend's eyes shattered him. Even though he knew it was not *his* Spock standing there, and that the logical Vulcan who had been his friend would himself have been devastated by all that had taken place between them, the look of contempt on Spock's face shook him deeply.

Kirk swallowed hard, and with an effort his voice was calm. "Mr. Spock, the Doctor is going to give you a mild sedative, then you'll go with him to sickbay. If you resist the guards are ordered to fire, and the effects of a phaser stun will be far more unpleasant."

He waited, but there was no answer. Reassured, he beckoned McCoy forward. It was a mistake.

Before the Doctor had taken two paces the Vulcan had lashed out at the nearest security guard. The only thing Kirk later remembered for sure about the resulting mayhem was that he had fired first, for which he was grateful. He was across the room to catch the Vulcan as he fell, and lowered him gently to the floor. Bleakly, he wondered whether this time he had gone too far, and whether Spock would ever be able to forgive him.

"Take him to sickbay."

He couldn't meet the Doctor's eyes, and made his way to stand on the transporter pad.

McCoy tried to find some words of comfort. "Jim, don't take it so hard. Spock would understand."

But the sparkle of the transporter effect had already taken the

Captain away.

The surface of Organia was a desolate wasteland.

Kirk, materialising amidst a sea of sand and broken boulders, wondered for a moment if the Enterprise had used the wrong coordinates. Then he realised there was a more logical reason for the barrenness of the landscape.

The Organians, having revealed their true forms to the Federation, obviously saw no need to continue with the subterfuge of masking the surface of their planet with what appeared to be a medieval way of life. The few ruins Kirk could see were probably the remains of the cities the Organians had abandoned centuries ago, along with their physical forms.

Impatiently the Captain awaited Ayelborne's arrival. The last thing he needed now was time to think. Too much time alone and he would begin to realise the impossibility of the task he had undertaken. Better to go forward, one step at a time, feeling his way, than to consider the enormity of the situation.

Kirk waited anxiously through the following minutes, always aware that each passing second brought the Vulcan suffering aboard the Enterprise that little bit closer to coma and death. Then suddenly Ayelborne was there, standing some yards away on the sand, still alone, although Kirk had no doubt that others of the Organian council were probably present in their non-corporeal forms.

"Captain, your First Officer was once heard to remark that in comparison to us, your race was like the amoeba. To the beings who have caused Vulcan's disappearance, we are the amoeba. They travel from galaxy to galaxy, and from time to time, as easily as you travel amongst the planets. Life as primitive as yours usually holds no interest for them; even a race such as ours only marginally attracts their attention. We were fortunate they would take the time to communicate with us.

"They were drawn to Vulcan because they accidentally detected the presence of thought emanations from the planet. They could not conceive of the possibility that creatures so low on the evolutionary scale could have coherent thought projections. They therefore put the planet in stasis, suspended outside of time and space, to study at their leisure. The people of Vulcan will not be aware of what has happened to them, as time no longer passes on their planet.

"We have tried to persuade this super-race that their action has caused much suffering, but they are not convinced. Would a Human be convinced that an ant was crying for the death of its loved one?

"Even a Human, however, might spare the ant if its feelings and suffering could be demonstrated. If we can take them a specimen that they can study, they might be persuaded to put Vulcan back."

The initial hope Kirk had felt at the Organian's words faded with that last statement. "There are no Vulcans left in our galaxy. All those still alive are comatose. Even my First Officer is not fit to be examined."

Ayelborne paused, considering. "If not a Vulcan, then someone who knows the Vulcan mind well might serve."

Kirk felt the icy fingers of fear crawl up his spine, but his decision was instantaneous. After all, he knew he could not live with the knowledge that Spock was either dead or insane, so there was really no decision to make. However, he needed to know what they were attempting.

"What happens if we are successful? What of all the Vulcans who have died?"

"If we can convince these beings that life of your level has feelings and is intelligent, they will return Vulcan at the time it was taken, and your galaxy will never know of its absence. We cannot guarantee, however, that you personally will be unharmed. They will need to scan very thoroughly, and we do not know the strength of your mind, or whether it will be able to survive such a probing."

Kirk smiled grimly. If he had a regret it was that he and Spock had not had time to say a proper farewell. "What must I do?"

As he spoke he noticed Ayelborne's Human form dissolving, and the intense bright light shone again from within him, enveloping him in a glowing orb.

The Organian's voice sounded, disembodied, from within the brightness. "Come with me, Captain, if you will."

Without further hesitation Kirk stepped forward into the dazzling circle of light.

PART II

Spock woke suddenly, instantly alert, his mind ice-calm as he determinedly fought to hold on to the fading echoes of his dream.

Correction. Not *his* dream.

He knew the set of Kirk's mind as well as he knew his own, and had no doubt that it was images from his friend's mind that had disturbed him.

This was the fifth night in succession that Spock had woken thus. The other times, he had come awake too late to remember more than the fragmented remnants of a nightmare. Tonight, he was better prepared.

Swinging his legs over the side of the bed Spock sat up and closed his eyes, opening his mind fully to the telepathic link he shared with the Captain.

There it was again. A curious distortion of reality; fear mixed with strange sights and sensations; a suggestion of presences, of beings too complex to understand. Above all else, the subconsciously remembered terror of a mind-scan, devastating in its thoroughness.

At that last impression Spock's eyes snapped open, and despite himself he shuddered. The images did indeed have the feel of memory, but he knew all of their recent missions, and there was

nothing in them that could have caused such disturbing nightmares.

Fleetingly, Spock glanced at the computer console. If he had been Human, he would probably have got up and checked the records of their recent assignments again; being Vulcan, he rejected the necessity, knowing that his mind had already sifted through the relevant facts and had found nothing there to explain the situation.

It was not only the dreams that concerned him. There was in addition a distinct change in the Captain's behaviour. Kirk was obviously sleeping badly, and eating little. In addition, the Captain frequently seemed distracted, caught up in some twilight world of his own.

There was also the matter of the bruise on the Captain's face. McCoy had assured Spock he knew nothing of the injury, and Kirk consistently refused to discuss it, even though he must have known that the story about a fall in his quarters was too transparently a lie.

If events continued in their present manner Spock knew that he and Dr. McCoy would have to relieve the Captain on medical grounds, and they both knew how deeply that would hurt their Commanding Officer.

That last fact made Spock reach a decision. He had been reluctant to force a confrontation with Kirk, hoping that his friend would come and discuss the situation with him voluntarily. Now, concern for the Captain's well-being overcame his caution. Getting up, he dressed quickly and headed for the Captain's quarters.

In the corridor he met McCoy, who was carrying a small phial containing some medication. They stood and regarded each other across the passageway, neither of them attempting to hide their concern. It was so often the way, that when Kirk was in trouble their arguing would stop, and they would work together to help him.

Spock's eyebrow rose, indicating the tablets. "For the Captain." It was not a question.

McCoy hesitated, then held the Vulcan's eyes. "You take them to him. He needs to talk to someone, and we both know he's more likely to talk to you."

Spock didn't deny it. "What would you suggest I do?"

McCoy grimaced. "Spock, he's showing all the signs of mental instability. I can't find anything physically wrong with him, apart from exhaustion, and we have to discover what's eating away at him before it destroys him. You've got to talk to him and convince him to accept your help in whatever way is necessary." The Doctor was reluctant to refer to a mind-meld in a more direct fashion.

After a moment the Vulcan nodded slightly in acknowledgement of the suggestion, and taking the phial turned to continue down the corridor.

Jim Kirk remembered.

Not all of it, and not all at once.

He had woken to find himself lying trembling in his bunk, sheets damp with sweat, and for several heart-stopping moments had been unable to remember even who he was, let alone why he should find himself in his cabin when he had no memory of getting there.

Gradually, however, the details came flooding back, right up to the moment when he had stepped into Ayelborne's circle of light, and with the remembrance came an overwhelming despair as he realised that all his efforts must have been in vain, for the Organian had said that if they were successful no-one would know that anything had ever happened to Vulcan, and if he remembered it must mean that things were still as before, and Spock was even now in sickbay in a critical condition.

Still slightly disorientated Kirk managed to get up and stumble over to his desk. He would have to tell McCoy that somehow he had been placed back on the ship, as the Doctor probably thought the Captain was still on Organia.

Pressing the intercom switch, he saw McCoy's face appear on the viewer. "How's Spock?" Kirk dreaded asking the question, fearful of being told that the Vulcan had lapsed into the final coma.

The Doctor looked at him quizzically. "How should I know? You saw him last. I assume he's still on the bridge."

Then McCoy noticed the expression on Kirk's face, and leaned forward anxiously. "Are you all right, Jim? You sound strange. How did you get the cut on your forehead?"

Only then did Kirk notice the pounding in his head, and raising his hand to the gash found his fingers sticky with blood. "I fell against the cupboard. It's not as bad as it looks." He didn't sound convincing, even to himself, and knew that McCoy would not be satisfied with the explanation.

Desperate for some time to be alone, to think, he stalled. "Look, Bones, I'd just woken up when I tripped and fell. Give me a few minutes to wash and change, and I'll be down to have it seen to, I promise."

Whether McCoy sensed the desperation in his voice, or whether he genuinely believed him, Kirk never knew. Grunting that he'd give Kirk ten minutes, no more, the Doctor broke the contact.

Hardly daring to hope, Kirk activated the computer console. What he wanted most of all was to call Spock, to see the Vulcan for himself, to talk to him, to convince himself that all was indeed well. However, he could think of no valid reason for calling the bridge in the middle of the night without arousing suspicion. Instead he played back all the recent messages from Starfleet Command, checked the ship's present status, and realised finally that the Organians' plan had worked.

Weak with relief, he rested his head in his hands then, and came nearer to breaking down than he had ever done during the hours spent in the alternate time-span. For a moment he wondered if all the events he remembered had indeed been only a nightmare, but the throbbing of the cut reminded him only too painfully that the memories were a reality.

Why he should have retained them was a mystery to him. Perhaps it was because he had been absent from the ship, and maybe even from

the galaxy, at the time of its readjustment. If that was the only price he had to pay for Vulcan, and for Spock's life and sanity, so be it.

Still emotionally dazed by recent events, he got up to change, and to try and regain a measure of composure. His work, after all, was not yet finished. Now he would have to convince McCoy that the cut on his head really was accidental.

Over the next few days Kirk realised that his problems were only just beginning.

He had tried to act normally with the Vulcan the following day, but their relationship was not a casual one, and Kirk knew that Spock sensed his own overwhelming joy and relief on first seeing his friend. Excuses about a nightmare were wearing a little thin; even McCoy had seemed unconvinced when Kirk had finally visited him in sickbay, and the Captain knew that neither of his friends believed the story of the fall against a cupboard.

As the days passed and Kirk had more time to think, he realised that he had a more serious problem. Although his conscious mind had no memory of what had happened after he had gone with the Organians, it seemed his subconscious certainly did remember something. At times it was as if a door began to swing open in his mind, and behind it he would glimpse the stuff of which nightmares are really made.

Part of him wanted to push open the door and see, but the greater part, the sane, rational part, knew that he must protect himself from the knowledge or it would destroy him.

At night, however, his conscious mind was not there to protect him. He had woken after the first nightmare, paralysed with fear, his mind struggling against images that made no sense to him, but made a mockery of all the physical and mental rules he lived by..

He had feared even then that the Vulcan would be telepathically disturbed by a vision of such intensity, and the look on Spock's face the following morning confirmed his suspicions. They had fenced verbally around the subject, and Kirk knew that Spock was puzzled and worried by the Captain's unusual reticence, but would not breach his privacy.

Gradually the nightmares increased in frequency and duration, until Kirk was afraid to go to sleep. If it were just the memory of what had happened to Vulcan he would probably have talked to Spock about it and let him help. He knew their friendship could withstand the ugly scenes of the Vulcan's insanity and violence. What worried Kirk more was that if he himself could not stand even a glimpse of what had happened to him after he had gone with the Organians, how would the Vulcan cope if accidentally exposed to it in a mind-meld? He knew that he himself did not possess the necessary mental shields to hide the memories from the Vulcan. Having risked so much to protect his friend's sanity, he wasn't going to take any chance of it being threatened again.

By the fifth night Kirk knew that the situation was getting out of hand. It seemed he had barely touched the pillow before he was once again awake, trembling and panic-stricken, unable for a long time to focus on his immediate surroundings.

In desperation he called McCoy and asked him to bring up something to give him a dreamless night's sleep. The Doctor didn't query the order, but Kirk knew there would be questions in the morning.

When the buzzer sounded Kirk was sitting on the bed, waiting. The door slid open to his "Come", and Spock walked into the room.

The Captain regarded his friend with mixed feelings. Now that Spock was here it seemed inevitable. He had been naive to suppose that the Vulcan would keep on ignoring the situation, and knew that Spock had only held back as long as he had because of their friendship.

"You've changed, McCoy!" Kirk's feeble attempt at humour fell embarrassingly on stony ground.

The Vulcan put down the medication he was carrying and placed his hands behind his back. His brown eyes were gentle, concerned, and the obvious care in them brought a lump to Kirk's throat. Getting up, he stood and faced his friend. It was going to be difficult to shut Spock out, but there was no way he would allow the Vulcan to help him while he was still so unsure of the consequences. He spoke gently.

"Spock, I know you're worried about the dreams I've been having, and I'm grateful. But it's probably just a bad patch I'm going through, and I'm sure a good night's sleep with one of McCoy's pills will sort it out."

The concern in the dark eyes only deepened. It was unlike Kirk to deny so strenuously that anything was wrong when the facts spoke so clearly for themselves.

"Jim, it is illogical to keep on suffering so. We both know that I can help with this problem. If you will permit..."

Spock moved forward confidently, automatically, the request for permission purely a formality after so many years of sharing, and his mind already preparing for the meld.

But Kirk had stepped back before he could stop himself, the fear showing naked in his eyes.

"No!"

The word fell like a knife between them, and they both stood frozen in time, neither accepting what had happened.

Finally Kirk tried to apologise. "I'm sorry, Spock. I didn't mean..."

But the Vulcan had already retreated and now stood formally, with his hands again behind his back. "I also am sorry. I obviously made an incorrect assumption. I hope you will overlook my interference."

Kirk wanted to shake his friend, to explain, to get back the closeness, but that couldn't be done without allowing the link, and there was always that unknown risk. Defeated, he said nothing, and after a moment the Vulcan turned and left the room.

Spock made his way thoughtfully along the corridor. At one time he would have taken Kirk's rejection personally and been hurt by it. Now, after many years, his faith in his friend was absolute, and logically the only reason the Captain was so afraid of a meld was because he had something to hide. And that something must affect him, Spock, because he had sensed Kirk's overwhelming need to protect the Vulcan.

Arriving at his quarters, Spock found McCoy waiting in the corridor. The Doctor was impatient.

"Well, Spock, what did you find out?"

Spock entered his rooms, indicating that the Doctor should follow. Inside they sat and faced each other across the desk.

"Well, Spock?"

The Vulcan considered. "There is something of which the Captain is very much afraid. Unfortunately, he would not confide in me."

McCoy took a deep breath to prevent himself from getting angry and spoke quietly. "Spock, I'm telling you this not as his friend but as Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise. In my opinion he's showing all the signs of mental collapse. It's imperative we find out what's causing it and help him, or within 24 hours or so he'll break down completely, and I'll have to log him unfit for command. You must know what that will do to him! Did you use the Vulcan mind touch?"

Spock hesitated. "He would not allow it."

McCoy looked up sharply, immediately aware of the implication of Spock's words. He made the next suggestion tentatively. "The medicine I gave him will knock him out for hours. Couldn't you...?"

But the Vulcan was already stiffening in outrage. "Doctor, you have no idea of what is involved. A Vulcan's respect for the privacy of the mind of the individual is absolute. Do you have any idea of what it is you are suggesting?"

The Doctor leaned forward and held the dark eyes challengingly. "Nothing that hasn't been done before!"

McCoy's words ran like electricity through the Vulcan. Still, after so many years, Spock sometimes found he had underestimated the Doctor, and was taken aback by his insight.

For indeed McCoy spoke the truth.

Once before Spock had touched Kirk's mind without permission, and then it was only to heal the pain of love. The fact that he had often been plagued by guilt over the incident was irrelevant. It *had* been done, and in circumstances far less serious than these. Until tonight, he had never suspected that McCoy knew.

Spock remembered now the despair and fear in Kirk's eyes, the pallor of his friend's skin, and the echoes of the nightmares. He felt his mind swaying in indecision, and stood up abruptly.

"I will consider it, but must think about it logically. Leave me alone to think."

McCoy stood up and went to the doorway; there he turned and paused. "Think all you like, Spock, but this isn't a logical situation. If you don't help him Jim will be destroyed. I give you my word I won't mention this conversation to anyone, but if Jim can't rely on you to help him, who can he trust?"

Turning, he left the room, leaving the Vulcan alone with his decision.

So it was that later that night Spock quietly pulled a chair up to the bed in which the Captain lay sleeping and, sitting down, prepared to initiate a meld.

In sleep Kirk's face looked ravaged and care-worn, and if Spock still had any remaining doubts about what he planned to do, he lost them then.

Asking a silent forgiveness from Surak and all the Vulcan elders, he placed his fingers gently on the correct nerve centres. Kirk's mind knew and recognised the touch and did not resist the contact, and Spock had no problems in getting through to the memories.

And, in doing so, pulled back his fingers as though burned.

Taking a deep breath he looked down at his long-time friend with compassion and new respect. In all of Spock's speculations he had never even come close to guessing the real truth. After a moment to prepare himself, and knowing now that he would not like all that he found, he resumed the contact.

This time he traced over all the events in Kirk's mind, even though he found it distressing to witness the scenes of violence instigated by his own insane form. In Kirk's mind there was no bitterness about the incidents, only a deep sorrow and understanding.

Withdrawing again for a while, Spock considered. The memories, fearful though they were, did not provide sufficient reason for Kirk's behaviour. Their friendship was strong enough to survive such an incident, and Spock knew from Kirk's mind that eventually the Captain would have confided in the Vulcan about the events so far.

When next he resumed contact he probed deeper; this time he came across the locked subconscious door and understood finally what the problem was, and what Jim was trying to protect him from. Pushing gently against the forbidden area he felt Kirk stir slightly in his drug-induced sleep, but he did not stop.

The door swung open easily, as if the subconscious was glad to be rid of its burden, and Spock then knew for himself the terror Kirk had felt on coming face to face with the race that had taken Vulcan. His blood ran cold at the fear and humiliation his friend had endured before they were satisfied that he was indeed a sentient creature.

The Vulcan knew in that instant that Jim could not live with

the subconscious memories. They destroyed too thoroughly all the fundamentals he believed in. But Spock, being a Vulcan, *could* cope, and without hesitation he gathered all the fears and transferred them to his own mind, where he could compartmentalise them and lock them away, and only steel himself to examine them when he wished to.

Only then did Spock withdraw from his friend's mind, knowing that for the first time in many days Kirk would have an untroubled sleep.

The Vulcan stayed in the chair and resolved to wait until Kirk awoke. In the morning they would have to talk. He would tell Jim what he had done - he owed him that much at the very least - and although he was sure of Kirk's initial anger he knew that eventually the Captain would see the logic of the situation and accept it.

Unfortunately, McCoy could not be told, but Spock knew that as long as the two of them were all right the Doctor would be content.

And it was, after all, logical that Spock's should be the mind to bear the brunt of the knowledge and store it safely.

He would do it for Kirk, so that his friend could continue to live his life unhampered by this fear.

For their friendship, which would only be strengthened because of this incident.

But most of all, he would do it for the people of his homeworld.

For Vulcan.



TRYING

Scotty sat looking glumly at the chair, aware only of discontent bordering upon near despair. Two whole weeks of Acting Captain, while *they* swanned off to shore leaves unknown.

Aware of a yeoman's sympathetic glance, he sat trying to act befitting a true Celt, a member of his clan. But it wasna' easy. No, it wasna' easy at all. No' tae speak of fair.

Susan P. Keighley



A GIFT FROM LOCK

by

Sandy Catchick

The Vulcan caught the subliminal change in attitude among the crew, although he would never admit to having the ability to do so. It was totally illogical, yet he could isolate both cause and effect in the Humans he worked with. The cause was the announcement that the Enterprise had been granted a full week's leave. Kirk had told the bridge crew alone only a few minutes earlier, yet the message had already been carried by scuttlebut to all corners of the ship. An amazing ability for a race that did not possess telepathy. That in itself would be worthy of study.

Spock returned to the change in attitude among the crew. If cause was the announcement of shore leave, then the effect was out of all proportion. All around him the crew acted as though they had just witnessed the birth of a child. He corrected himself - they acted as *Humans* reacting to the birth of a child. In a word, they all became "crazy". There was no Vulcan equivalent to the word "crazy". Somehow that made the word all the more apt in the circumstances. At times like this he wondered if he would ever truly understand Humans.

Confirming his observation, the Doctor bounced up to him, grinning stupidly. "Hi, Spock. Have you put in for shore leave yet?"

"No." Spock hadn't even considered the question.

"Look, you might not admit it, but even Vulcans need rest."

"Indeed, Doctor. I intend to rest on board ship. I do not have your need of green grass and excessive alcohol in order to relax. I can recuperate quite adequately on the Enterprise." He didn't add the thought *without you illogical Humans to disturb me* but McCoy seemed to pick it up anyway.

"I know you'll be glad to be rid of us for a while, Spock, but that's not the same as going ashore yourself. Think about it. I might have to make it a medical order otherwise."

"On what grounds, Doctor? My efficiency ratings are ..."

"I don't care about your efficiency ratings, or even whether my instruments tell me you're perfectly fit. I know what my eyes see and what my instincts tell me. You need a break, and I'll think of some way of making it stick whatever your records show."

Spock raised an eyebrow, but refused to be drawn. His agile mind considered a variety of methods McCoy could use to force him to take shore leave, but he knew the Human was capable of thinking up something so diabolical that his logical mind would never consider it. He decided that attack was the best form of defence. He changed the subject.

"Doctor, do you have the information I requested on phenylbutazone?"

"I'm sorry, Spock. I can't get around to it until after we reach Lock. How about giving me seven days after we get back from leave to get the information? After all, it is only for some private research of yours, isn't it? Phenylbutazone isn't used any more, and it will take me a while to get the details even when I get around to it."

With sudden insight McCoy added, "You're only trying to change the subject. You just think about taking some shore leave yourself. Lock is a beautiful planet."

McCoy left behind a very thoughtful Vulcan as the Doctor caught sight of yet another adversary. Nurse Chapel hadn't put in for shore leave yet. She certainly needed some rest. The Doctor hurried after her, determined to persuade her to take some leave.

Spock continued his interrupted journey to the bridge. He was due on duty in 3.85 minutes so he walked more slowly than usual. Sulu joined him as he entered the turbolift.

"Have you put in for leave, Mr. Spock?" asked the smiling Helmsman, but before the Vulcan had a chance to give him a negative reply the young oriental launched into a soliloquy.

"Chekov and I are going in the first landing party. Boy, are we going to have some fun! Lock is like a paradise according to the records. The people are friendly and do they know how to make folks welcome. There's a pretty wide range of entertainment; the shops, the bars, the" His voice trailed off as he remembered just who he was talking to. He grinned rather sheepishly.

"There are other attractions too, Mr. Spock. There's an incredibly well endowed library with real leather-bound books. Chekov and I thought we might even go there ourselves if we get around to it after all the other things we plan to do on Lock."

Spock was grateful that Sulu's conversation had been one sided and had not required a response from him, but what Sulu had said made him even more thoughtful. It would seem that there could be something on Lock worthy of further investigation. He debated whether it would be more interesting carrying out his personal research on the ship, or availing himself of the facilities of the Lock library.

The decision was made for him by Captain Kirk. Unwittingly, as the turbolift arrived at the bridge and deposited the Helmsman and the First Officer, the Captain finished making an apology to Uhura that heightened the Vulcan's curiosity to the point where he felt compelled to learn more.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant," said the Captain with a disarming smile at the seated Communications Officer. "I promise I'll get around to it when I get back from Lock. You can wait 'til then, can't you?"

Uhura looked at him coldly.

"Please, Lieutenant... Uhura!" he pleaded.

She could hold her pretence of anger no longer and burst out

laughing. "You win, Captain. I never could resist a charmer. One day that will be my downfall.' But once you get back from Lock I'll hold you to your promise."

Spock raised an eyebrow in silent query. Kirk smiled at him, misinterpreting his curiosity for disapproval.

"Don't worry, Spock. It's all above board."

"Above board, Captain?"

"Never mind, Spock. I mean there's nothing for you or Lieutenant Uhura to worry about. Now what about shore leave? I don't suppose Bones has persuaded you to go down with the first landing party?"

"No, Captain. However, I should like to go down to Lock. There is some research I wish to undertake."

Kirk's smile widened. "So Bones got to you, did he? He told me he would get you down there even if he had to make it a medical order."

Spock had been going to retort that the Doctor had not influenced his decision to beam down, when it occurred to him that it was McCoy who had first aroused his curiosity. For a second he wondered if they were all in a conspiracy against him to force him to take leave, but as he saw Sulu talking animatedly with Chekov he dismissed the notion as unworthy. He fell back on formality.

"Lock has an exceptionally well stocked library, Captain."

Kirk decided to forestall a lecture on the Lock library. There were times when his First Officer could take things a bit too literally - or even literarily, he thought to himself with an inward smile.

"I'll put you down for the second shore leave party, with Lieutenant Uhura. No doubt you can tell us about the planet and the people."

"Of course." It was not a boast, but a simple statement of fact.

Spock went on to explain that Lock was a Class M planet with Earth-like climate. The population was humanoid and highly civilised. Like Vulcans they were a peace-loving race, reserved and quiet. In contrast to Vulcans they were blond and light skinned and they were also - and here Spock hesitated fractionally - fond of a joke.

Kirk laughed and the whole bridge crew joined in.

"You mean they have a sense of humour, Spock."

"I believe I said that, Captain."

The Vulcan was eventually allowed to continue with his description of the planet, the people and the various shore leave facilities on offer. The local customs on the place of women in society were of great interest to Sulu and Chekov. It seemed that any woman travelling alone was fair game for an approach from a single man, since all married or 'accounted for' women always went

out with their partners.

Kirk himself was not going on leave. The Enterprise had been allowed to stop at Lock because Kirk had been called away to an official opening ceremony requiring the presence of a Starfleet officer of Captain's rank or above. Kirk had not been too pleased until he had discovered that the ceremony was to open a newly established brewery on the far side of the planet. The guests of honour were to be given a guided tour of the brewery and to be allowed to taste the product. Kirk had concluded that for once the Gods were smiling on him and had accepted with unseemly haste.

The Starship slid gracefully into orbit around Lock just forty hours later. Kirk was immediately called to his official duties, and Spock took the con. Shortly thereafter contact was established with the shore leave facilities on Lock and the first landing parties beamed down.

Spock stayed on the Enterprise, spending his time equally between the bridge, the engine room and his own quarters. He had little time to progress in his personal research on the side effects of ancient drugs, and even less time to ponder the new research he had decided to carry out on Lock.

However, it was soon time for the second shore leave parties to avail themselves of the facilities on Lock. Spock handed over command to Scott and joined the others in the transporter room. He had chosen to wear Vulcan attire in deference to the local population, and his arrival caused something of a stir. Not many people had seen him in the flowing cloak and Vulcan soft suit and boots. He ignored the comments his Vulcan hearing couldn't fail to register and took his place calmly beside Lieutenant Uhura.

Once on the planet the shore leave party split up. Uhura went with some of her friends from engineering and others moved into pairs or groups. Spock was left standing alone. It was a condition with which he was patently familiar. He squashed the sudden pang of loneliness and turned towards the library. Only Uhura turned back long enough to watch the Vulcan walk away with his purposeful, long, graceful strides. His dignity alone was enough to separate him from the easy-going inhabitants of Lock, despite the similarity of their attire. Uhura was concerned about him. What would he do on leave without the Captain to accompany him? It was one thing to do research alone and quite another to really enjoy yourself. She determined to make him spend at least one day away from research.

After the initial stab of loneliness, when Spock's mind instinctively turned to the Captain, the Vulcan found himself intrigued with his research and quite forgot time and place. The library was as excellent as it had been reported to be. The structure was reminiscent of the British Museum he had once visited on Earth. It was built for a purpose, but nevertheless aesthetically pleasing. Here, however, the stone was a deep yellow and not a greyish white. Inside, the books reached from floor to ceiling, all showing the care and attention of someone who appreciated the treasure they represented.

Spock spent a short while examining the collection of books, drawn to them by an insatiable curiosity he could not control, but after a short tour of the library he made his way to the research section and commenced to investigate the item that everyone expected to purchase on Lock. Time went so quickly that Spock was caught unawares when the librarian came over to him.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but the library is about to close. We open again at 8.00 a.m. if you wish to return in the morning."

Spock studied the helpful man, recognising both intelligence and curiosity in the blue eyes.

"Thank you. I will return tomorrow."

"Perhaps if you were to explain the nature of your research I would be able to assist you?" offered the librarian.

Spock explained what he was searching for. He did not know how to spell the word, and despite the phonetic research facilities this appeared to be causing problems. Although Spock was certain that the item was to be found on Lock the librarian, Peter, had never heard of such a thing.

Spock retired to a local hotel for the night, but was back at precisely 8.00 a.m. the next morning. Peter let him into the library and joined him in his search. They were hindered by the fact that Spock did not know exactly what it was that he searched for. They had a certain amount of information to help them. They had the phonetic name, the fact that it was something sought after by Humans, obtainable on Lock and transportable back to the ship. The only other pertinent fact was that the item came in more than one shape, the important classification being "round". They searched for references to circles, rounds, globes and a variety of other alternatives, but without success.

Peter was as interested in Spock as he was in the actual research. He had never met a Vulcan before, although he had heard they were a peaceful but unemotional race. He was surprised that the Vulcan could spend a whole day concentrating on research without stopping for rest or food. At the end of the day Peter invited Spock home to join his family for supper. He was delighted when the Vulcan accepted.

Once supper was over, a meal shared with the whole family, Peter directed Spock to the living room and his wife left the two of them with a cup of coffee. Peter asked why Spock wanted to find the object he was researching. When Spock explained that it was a matter of improving efficiency on board the Starship the librarian became really interested. The talk drifted to efficiency ratings and targets in general and Peter was able to expound his favourite subject, the performance monitors that the Planet Lock had set up to record performance in various walks of life on the planet. Peter was delighted when the Vulcan understood the various graphs of targets and performance levels, and even more so when Spock's occasional comment made him realise that the Vulcan also understood the difficulties inherent in measuring, recording, standardising and improving performance measures. He and Spock ended up talking through most of the night. They agreed that one of the biggest problems was the fact that the Federation kept changing their mind about what exactly they wanted to measure.

Eventually Spock was shown to the guest room and was able to sleep for a few hours before Peter's household woke him up as the children got ready for school.

When Peter and Spock arrived at the library they were met by an extremely worried Communications Officer. Uhura had decided to invite Spock to go shopping with her for the day, but had been told

by his hotel that the Vulcan had not returned to his room and hadn't left any message at reception. She was relieved that he was all right.

Spock explained that he had spent the night with Peter and his family. He had not expected anyone to be searching for him, and had his communicator with him in case he was recalled to the ship. Uhura had been so worried that she hadn't even thought of trying the communicator. She forgot her concern when she realised that Spock was not only fine, but appeared to have enjoyed his stay with the librarian. She asked the Vulcan if he would accompany her shopping for the day - the local custom of men being able to ask out any lady who travelled unaccompanied made it essential that she go shopping with someone. Most men did not like the idea of going shopping, and she was hoping Spock would not object to going with her.

Spock was torn between his wish to continue his research and his wish to please Uhura. The Communications Officer rarely asked anything of him, and he held her in great respect. The battle was quickly fought, and Uhura won easily. She would have been extremely flattered, only she did not realise that the decision had involved the Vulcan in a personal debate. He hid his feelings so well and thought so quickly that to her it seemed as if Spock accepted without demur when he replied, "It will be an honour, Lieutenant."

Just then Peter came over and asked Spock if he was abandoning his research. Uhura asked what it was that Spock was researching. The Vulcan replied quickly, suddenly remembering that Uhura would know far more about it than he did.

"We are looking for a 'Twoit', Miss Uhura. Perhaps you can help?"

She shook her head. "I am sorry, Mr. Spock, but I've never heard of a 'Twoit'. What is it?"

"Perhaps I have pronounced it incorrectly, Lieutenant. When the Captain discussed it with you it appeared that you knew exactly what it was."

She was mystified. "I'm afraid it doesn't sound like anything I am familiar with. Perhaps you could give me more details?"

"Indeed," replied the Vulcan. "It would appear that the Captain, Doctor McCoy and Mr. Sulu all expect to acquire a 'Twoit' on Lock before returning to the Enterprise. They all wished to obtain a round one. I am not certain if that is significant."

Uhura was puzzled and this showed on her face as she frowned in concentration. "A round 'Twoit', you say?"

"That is correct, Lieutenant. A round 'Twoit'" replied the Vulcan.

For Uhura, as Spock replied, the penny finally dropped.

"Mr. Spock, can you remember the exact words the Captain used when he wished to acquire .. uh .. one of these?"

Spock inclined his head. "His precise words were - 'I am sorry, Lieutenant, I promise I'll get a round 'Twoit' when I get back from Lock. You can wait 'til then, can't you?'"

Uhura collapsed in a fit of giggles. The Vulcan stared at her with both eyebrows on the rise. Peter, who had also understood the joke, found himself joining in the Lieutenant's laughter. He had to remind himself that they were in a library. As though to emphasise this they all heard a loud "shush", although it was impossible to pinpoint exactly who had uttered it.

Uhura had to ask, "What exactly did Doctor McCoy and Mr. Sulu say to you, Mr. Spock?"

At his hesitation she added, "I am sure I will be able to explain it to you if you tell me."

Spock explained, "I asked the Doctor for some information on phenylbutazone and he said it would take him a while to get the details even when he obtained a round 'Twoit'. Mr. Sulu said that he and Mr. Chekov might visit the library if they got a round 'Twoit' after all the other things they planned to do on Lock."

Uhura had again creased up in barely controlled laughter, and Peter was suppressing his own reaction with a hand over his mouth long before Spock completed his explanation. Eventually Uhura managed to enlighten the bemused Vulcan.

"There is no such thing as a 'Twoit', Mr. Spock. What all three of them meant was that they would do those things when they found the time. It is a colloquialism, 'to get around to it'. When the Captain said he would get around to it when he got back from Lock, he meant that he would find the time to take me to the dinner he promised when he got back. Do you see, sir?"

Spock saw only too well. He had spent several days of his leave searching for a non-existent item. He had been so sure that if he could find a round 'Twoit' he would be able to improve the efficiency of the Humans with whom he worked; instead it seemed likely that the good Doctor would tease him mercilessly about his lack of understanding.

"It would seem that I have wasted my time, Lieutenant" he said calmly.

Uhura's grin widened. "No, sir. I mean, it need not be wasted."

"Lieutenant?" Spock had concluded that the Human race was quite mad.

"I mean, what if there was such a thing as a round 'Twoit'? No-one would be able to make any excuses about putting things off until they got around to it if they already had one, would they?"

"I do not follow your reasoning, Lieutenant," admitted the Vulcan honestly.

"Don't you see, Mr. Spock? If we were to give them a round 'Twoit' they would have no excuse for not doing what is asked of them. I can just imagine the Captain having to take me out to dinner on our first day back because he had got a round 'Twoit'. Just think of Doctor McCoy having to do that research for you because he promised to do so when he got a round 'Twoit'."

"But there is no such thing, Lieutenant. You have just told me so."

"I know that and you know that Mr. Spock, but do they? You thought there could be such a thing. All we have to do is make some."

"Lieutenant?" queried a most confused Vulcan.

"Do you trust me, Mr. Spock?"

"Undoubtedly," came the instant response, which caused Uhura to blush.

"Then let's go shopping, and we'll buy the presents I had in mind plus some round 'Twoits'. I know exactly what I am doing, sir. I promise."

Spock dutifully followed her out of the library after thanking Peter for his hospitality and his help.

He soon realised why the Lieutenant had asked him to accompany her. At the first shop, selling ladies' perfume, Spock insisted on waiting at the entrance. As soon as Uhura entered without him he saw her become the centre of unwanted attention. Several of the local men approached her and asked her to go out with them. The Vulcan was horrified at their boldness. Uhura told them she was already partnered with someone, and they asked why he didn't accompany her in that case. If she was alone they were entitled to ask her out. In desperation she said she was accompanied, but her partner had not wanted to enter a ladies' perfume shop and was waiting at the entrance for her.

The three men did not believe her. Their approach became more boisterous. Spock, having listened without comment up to that point, decided that it would be safer for him to enter a perfume shop than to let Uhura face these men alone. He stepped forward and asked mildly, "How much longer will you be, Uhura?"

His sudden and silent approach, together with his dignified, almost threatening appearance, caused a panic among the young men.

"A Vulcan. No wonder he didn't come in here!" said one.

"Let's get out of here, Vulcans are peculiar about their women," said another.

Spock raised an eyebrow as they charged past him, almost knocking him off his feet in their haste.

The Bantu woman, however, rewarded him for his thoughtfulness. She noted that he had called her Uhura and not Lieutenant, and was particularly grateful for his insight.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. A timely rescue. Now that you're here I won't be very long."

"Hardly a precise response, Lieutenant," responded the Vulcan, returning to formality. Then as an afterthought he added, "However, you are on shore leave."

They spent the day visiting various shops, stopping only for lunch which Spock insisted on paying for. The Vulcan was fascinated by Uhura's approach to shopping and realised for the first time just how much his mother had sacrificed in the everyday pleasures of Human life by marrying a Vulcan husband. Uhura caught the amusement

in his eyes on several occasions as she got vendors to show her a wide variety of articles and frequently ended up purchasing the first one she had seen on entering the shop. She was glad she had asked the Vulcan, and knew Spock would not have accompanied her just to be polite, although the local custom might have influenced his decision.

The final store they visited was a jewellery shop proudly displaying the fact that they made personalised items of jewellery. Uhura, looking impishly at Spock, ordered four medallions to be made up with the following words etched on each:-

"NO EXCUSES NOW YOU HAVE A ROUND TWOIT"

If the jeweller was mystified by the order, he hid the fact as well as any Vulcan. After half an hour they left the shop armed with four medallions, each boxed in a plush velvet case and wrapped in highly decorative paper and ribbon, as only the people of Lock knew how to wrap a present.

Back on board the Enterprise the next day the bridge crew exchanged stories about their leave on Lock. Everyone had had a good time. Kirk, as he had anticipated, had found the brewery and the beer to his liking. Sulu and Chekov had thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the local shops and bars, but hadn't got a chance to visit the library after all. Uhura told them about her shore leave, leaving out only the day she spent with Spock.

When everyone had had their turn, Kirk turned to Spock.

"What about you, Mr. Spock? Did you get to see the library?"

"Indeed, Captain. I also had some very interesting discussions with the librarian."

Kirk smiled and turned quickly back to the viewscreen. He could imagine Spock's very interesting discussions being of a technical nature and was glad he had avoided them.

Spock took the opportunity to retrieve the four small packets he had smuggled onto the bridge before the others arrived.

"Captain," he said, getting everyone's attention immediately from the tone of his voice. "I have a small gift for each of you from the Planet Lock. I believe these will not only remind you of your enjoyable stay on Lock, but will also improve your efficiency now you are back aboard the Enterprise."

He handed a parcel each to Kirk, McCoy, Chekov and Sulu. They looked at the locally wrapped gifts and back at Spock in some disbelief. The Vulcan met their stares blandly and waited for them to open the little presents. Luckily, McCoy was the first to open his.

"Er, thank you Spock. But what is it?"

Spock's gaze turned full force on the hapless Doctor and held him trapped like a fly on fly paper.

"It is just what you asked for, Doctor."

"What I asked for?????"

"Indeed, Doctor. You told me you would get the details I requested on phenylbutazone once you got around to it." His gaze moved on to Sulu and Chekov.

"You, Mr. Sulu, told me that Mr. Chekov and yourself would visit the Lock library once you got around to it." The stare came to rest on Kirk. Spock could not keep the twinkle out of his eye when facing Jim.

"You, Captain, promised to take Lieutenant Uhura to dinner once you got around to it."

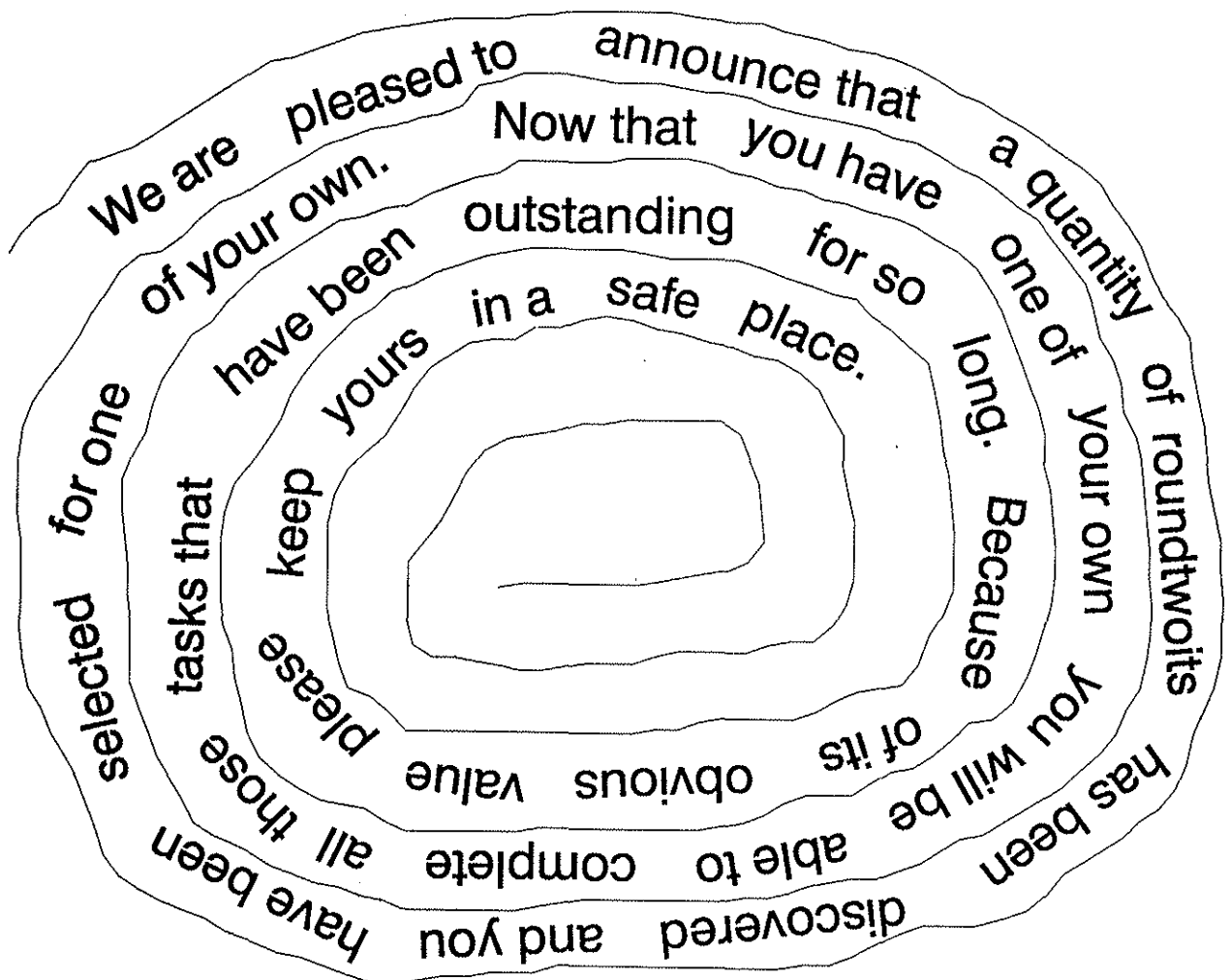
He raised his voice a fraction to address them all.

"Gentlemen, I have provided each of you with a round 'Twoit'. I assume you will have no more excuses for putting off the actions you promised to carry out."

Spock swept majestically off the bridge, fighting to keep Vulcan decorum intact in the face of the expressions he had just witnessed on the faces of the Captain, Doctor, Helmsman and Navigator. He regretted ever having looked at the Communications Officer, who had actually winked at him! But he made it to the safety of the turbolift with decorum in one piece and reputation soaring.

Uhura slipped between the closing turbolift doors and said sweetly "Eight o'clock tonight then, Captain, Sugar!"

As the doors finally closed Uhura joined her co-conspirator, decorum forgotten, in silent hysterics.



FOR THE WANT OF A NAIL

by

Krysia Baczala

Spock experienced an unusual feeling. He was sitting at his usual post on the bridge of the Enterprise at the time. His in-built medical awareness, which Humans do not have, warned him that something, somewhere, was amiss.

His head snapped up when he first noticed the sensation, and his eyes glazed over for a moment as he set apart a section of his brain to analyse the problem.

Kirk, in the command chair, attuned to everyone and everything on the bridge - but particularly to Spock - noticed the change in his friend's posture. Rising, he crossed to the science station. By the time he had taken the few steps necessary to bring him alongside his friend, Spock had begun operating switches and pressing controls again.

"Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan looked up. "Yes, Captain?"

"Is everything all right?"

"There was an unusual momentary flux on the geo-tholamite scan," Spock replied. "I am monitoring it, sir."

Kirk shrugged. "Carry on, then," he said, and returned to his seat.

There had indeed been 'a momentary flux on the geo-tholamite scan', but only because Spock had caused the instruments to create it in the few seconds between sensing his Captain leaving his chair, and Kirk's question. Spock realised that he had almost lied. Well, not lied exactly, but he had manufactured the situation so that he could control it. He decided to analyse his motives for doing so later; he was not sure they were entirely pure. At the moment, however, he had a far more urgent priority. Putting most of his station on automatic, Spock assumed a working posture and began a preliminary self probe.

Vulcans, unlike Humans, have the ability not only to monitor, but, if necessary, alter many of the bodily functions which in Humans are automatic. That is to say, that in a Human, for example, the respiration rate is linked to physical exertion; it changes, without conscious control, to meet the needs of the body, as does the pulse and other processes. Although Humans are aware of the change, they can do little to control it.

Vulcans too have these systems which keep them functioning automatically. They do not, for example, decide consciously to take each breath, but they can, if the situation requires, override the involuntary system and take control. In addition they can sense more minute changes, such as vitamin deficiencies or a lack of minerals, so that they can supplement their diets to compensate. Or

they can detect the presence of a virus or a bacteria which is foreign to the system, and can then mobilise the necessary body defences to deal with it.

The peculiar sensation Spock had noticed was the appearance in his body of an invading bacterial infection. Outwardly continuing his work, inwardly he began to analyse the problem.

As far as he was able to judge he was at present only mildly infected. There was a presence in his blood, and some of it had concentrated in his left lung. His temperature was up by 0.2 degrees; this at the moment was the only effect. The puzzle was that he did not appear to be able to identify the invading bacteria. In the same way that Humans may recognise a familiar taste or smell, Spock and other Vulcans had the ability to identify a particular infection. This was a very useful ability, with great implications in terms of Vulcan medical care; imagine the advantages of a patient presenting himself to a physician with his malady already diagnosed, and simply requiring medication.

Long ago Spock's body had learned to attack all common Vulcan diseases. On joining Starfleet he had been immunised against just about everything medical authority could conceive of him coming in contact with. When he had requested a posting on a ship crewed almost entirely by Humans, he had had to undergo a variety of further tests and inoculations to ensure his safety. Some were unnecessary - Vulcans cannot, for example, contract measles. Spock's body had long ago learned to fight off a great many germs, ranging from typhoid to the common cold, and anything in between. But this, he couldn't identify, and he didn't like the feeling. He could sense that it was potentially strong, and the sensation the bacteria generated was unpleasant.

Having finished his brief self examination, his logical mind decided that he should seek more data about the situation, and he rose from his station and approached Kirk. He hesitated, knowing that Humans could be easily worried; he did not wish to cause his Captain undue alarm - after all, this might turn out to be just a new strain of influenza, and nothing more.

Kirk looked up. "Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"Captain, I request permission to leave my station for a short time to obtain further data regarding a minor scientific anomaly."

"Something interesting?" asked Kirk, who was always keen to learn new things himself.

"It is too early to say yet, sir," Spock told him.

"Very well," Kirk nodded, and signed to Chekov to take over Spock's post.

In the turbolift on the way to his quarters Spock noted that his temperature was now 0.4 degrees above normal. Arriving in his cabin, he took up a relaxed meditative position and began a deeper probe.

First he ran the new bacteria past his internal medical sensors to confirm the impression he had of it. Feeling that it was stronger now, he knew even before he double checked that this was

not something he had ever experienced before, but he checked anyway.

Having confirmed his analysis, he then attempted to mobilise his existing defences to see if any of them had any significant - or even marginal - effect on the foreign organism. They did not.

At that point Spock decided that he might soon have to request information from medical experts. If he could not identify and suppress the problem himself, he would have to ask the med-comp to do an analysis for him, and then seek a doctor's assistance in procuring the required antidote.

He crossed the cabin and poured himself a glass of water - his throat was very dry. Sipping the liquid, he considered the situation, wondering if he was the only person infected. Perhaps others were, too. He tried to work out how he had managed to pick up the bacteria - a Starship is a relatively sterile place - and considered, too, the possibility that he was infectious to others. That, more than anything else, made him reluctant to approach the medical staff yet. Instead, after a few moments, he left his cabin and made his way to a little-used research lab not far from his room. Once there he politely asked the only person present, a young lab technician, to fetch him from stores an obscure piece of equipment that he knew it would take her at least half an hour to find.

With the lab to himself he took a blood sample from his arm, and after spinning it briefly in a centrifuge he made up several slides and placed one of them into a microscope, linking it to the medi-comp and asking for an analysis.

The computer droned out its findings in its usual nasal tone, telling him that the blood was that of a healthy adult Vulcan male, copper based and rich in vitamins and minerals. After a moment it added, "Bacteria are present."

"Identify," Spock ordered.

"Not found."

Spock's eyebrows rose. This was unexpected. He had assumed that this was simply something he had not personally encountered, and that once he had identified it he could simply approach McCoy or M'Benga for the necessary medication. It had not occurred to him that this might be something completely different, a new strain unknown to medical science. That would be most unusual. As a rule bacteria had been classified long ago, and it was rare to come across an unidentified form. He checked and re-checked; even when he asked the computer for an approximate classification, he got nowhere.

Spock prepared several samples from his blood cells and made up some growth medium with which he filled some culture dishes. Infecting each dish, he placed them in a sterile cabinet and sealed it; they would be needed to test the effects of available antibiotics. He became aware that he was thirsty again, and that he felt cold. He always felt slightly chilly at Human temperature, but had become resignedly accustomed; now his fingers were stiff as he worked.

The technician returned and he asked her to leave him alone in the lab, giving her extra time off. She left with a word of thanks, slightly puzzled but pleased to have the free time.

Spock then called the bridge. "Captain, if you will agree it would be most convenient to have my relief complete my duty watch."

This time Kirk was not so easily sidetracked. "What's up?" he asked.

Spock considered his answer. "Sir, I require a further half hour to finalise my research, then I shall report to you in full."

He could almost hear Kirk deciding whether to be difficult or not. The Captain decided to give his First Officer the benefit of the doubt; however, he wasn't going to be put off quite that easily.

"Half an hour, Mr. Spock. I'll expect your call." The intercom clicked off.

Spock considered going to fetch McCoy, but bearing in mind that he might be contagious, he decided to ask the Doctor to come to the lab instead. He called sickbay, and McCoy answered personally.

"Doctor," Spock said, keen to speak to him as soon as possible, "I would be most grateful of you would join me in Lab H2 immediately."

There was a pause of several seconds while McCoy first absorbed the unusual request and the manner in which it was delivered, then thought about whether to argue, be sarcastic, or just complain. But there was something about the tone...

"Right," he said, and was there in less than three minutes.

Spock was in the far corner of the lab when McCoy entered, the door swooshing shut behind him. "Stop!" the Vulcan said.

McCoy did so, though more from surprise than because he was being told to do so. He rocked back on his heels and simply looked a question at Spock.

The Vulcan explained clearly and logically what had happened. He outlined his detection of the disease, his inability to identify it, his lack of knowledge concerning the source, and his worry regarding his potentially infectious state.

McCoy, for all his apparent and frequent tomfoolery, was an exceptional and efficient physician when the situation demanded it - he would not have been Chief Surgeon of a Starship otherwise. He mentally leapt into action.

"You did the right thing to send for me and stay here," he said. "First things first. How do you feel?"

Vulcans do not lie, so Spock told him. "I feel cold. My joints are becoming slightly stiff where fluid is gradually building up around them. There is congestion in my left lung. My throat is constantly dry and sore, and I have a temperature 4 degrees above that which is normal for a Vulcan. I am not, however, in distress at present."

"Is that 4 degrees above normal even though you are controlling it?" McCoy demanded.

"No," Spock assured him. "I have been occupied, and have not had the opportunity to begin the controlling process. I would need

to concentrate to master the physical symptoms. I shall do so soon, however, as you will no doubt put me in isolation."

"Quite right," McCoy nodded, "and sooner rather than later."

"Doctor, the Captain knows nothing of this. I have promised him I will give him my full report twenty minutes from now."

"And so you shall," McCoy assured him.

Over the next quarter of an hour a lot was organised. An unknown disease aboard the Enterprise had to be treated very seriously until it was proved not to be fatal to the crew. McCoy checked over Spock's findings; they were - not surprisingly - correct. He mobilised his medical teams to stand ready to sterilise the lab, Spock's cabin, the bridge, and the corridors between; he ordered med-techs to take blood samples for testing from the young lab technician, from Spock's yeoman, from bridge personnel, and from a random selection of the rest of the crew; and he had sickbay prepare an isolation unit, and transferred Spock to it.

All was ready when the time came for Spock's report to Kirk. The only thing that remained was for the Captain to give orders for the necessary procedures to be carried out.

Spock called the bridge and asked Kirk to join him in sickbay; Kirk was intrigued, and came straight away. His smile of anticipation faded the moment he caught sight of Spock standing behind the window of the isolation unit.

"Spock!" and he brushed a hand briefly against the partition. "What's going on?" he demanded, turning to McCoy.

They explained it to him.

A new mind can often help to shed new light on a problem, can bring inspiration where it was lacking, can solve a mystery.

"The Romulan child!" said Kirk.

They had picked up a distress signal which appeared to originate from just across the Romulan neutral zone. Despite the fact that the signal blasted through space with great intensity, a sensor scan indicated that it came from only a small vessel, probably commercial and family operated.

The garbled message was in Romulan. It was interpreted by the translator and proved to be a desperate plea for help. The tiny ship had been hit by a meteor and was disintegrating around the distraught occupants.

Kirk rapidly weighed up the dangers of tangling with Romulans against the universal duty to help space travellers in distress. He ordered Helm to head for the position from which the signal had come.

Moments later a flash indicated the demise of the little craft. Thinking the incident was over, the bridge crew had sighed and returned to their duties, but Spock had caught a glimmer at the

edge of the sensor scans. Checking it out he found that two escape pods had been jettisoned from the damaged vessel. They appeared to be intact and were floating free in space. He informed the Captain.

"Maximum range sensors," ordered Kirk. "Is there anyone out there who can help them?"

But it seemed that the Enterprise was the only ship in that area.

"Mr. Sulu, bring us alongside those escape pods," Kirk decided.

Within an hour the Enterprise was poised in space right over the pods, rather like a hawk preparing to snatch a pair of tiny mice in its claws.

McCoy, his opinion having been sought, recommended that as the condition of the survivors was unknown the transporter should not be used to bring them on board, since they might not live through the transition. Kirk ordered that tractor beams be used to draw the pods into the shuttle hangar bay.

This was done, and when the shuttle deck was repressurised Kirk, Spock, and McCoy, together with a Security team, entered the bay with their phasers at the ready.

"Opinion, Mr. Jackson?" Kirk asked his Security Chief.

"I recommend we stay well back, sir, until tricorder scan is completed. It may be a trap."

They kept close to the bay doors while Spock began a quick analysis. As he did so the hinged section on one of the pods swung open and a large Romulan male emerged. Green blood oozed from several wounds around his face and neck; he seemed weak, and hardly able to take in his surroundings.

McCoy stepped forward to help him. Kirk restrained the Doctor as the Romulan growled deep in his throat and moved a hand to a weapon at his belt. The Security team stiffened, instantly on guard; for a moment there was a standoff.

"Spock?" Kirk prompted.

"There appear to be four survivors, Captain. The other pod contains a mature female and a young male. There is also a very small female in the pod the male travelled in. They have all suffered some bruising and shock, but three of them are not critically injured. However," and he looked closely at his tricorder, "the young male appears to have quite serious damage to his abdomen, and is losing blood rather rapidly."

"Jim, we've got to help them!" McCoy insisted.

Kirk agreed. "Give it a try - but take it easy."

McCoy opened his medical kit and held it so that the Romulan could see the contents, then he took two careful paces forward. Immediately the Romulan adopted a defensive stance and shouted out. They didn't need a translator to tell them that he meant "Get back!"

"Shall I stun him, Captain?" asked Jackson.

Kirk shook his head. "If we're going to help them we'll have to build up some sort of trust."

"I agree, Captain," said Spock. He took one step forward and said in simple but precise Romulan, "The child is injured. He will die if you do not allow us to help. This man is a Healer. Allow him to assist."

The Romulan seemed even more confused to find that one of his enemies could speak Rhiansu. But this was a Vulcan; he had heard that one should expect the unexpected from a Vulcan. "Wait!" he said.

Reaching into the pod from which he had emerged he pulled out a baby girl and sat her on the floor next to him. Then he crossed to the other pod and opened it. He said something to the woman inside, and then bent over and picked up the boy. The child was about the size of a seven year old Human, and was obviously unconscious.

The woman, looking around with evident yet sternly controlled curiosity, clambered out of the pod. Together she and the male laid the limp form of their child on the deck before them.

While the Romulan had been distracted, Spock had whisked the medical kit out of the startled Doctor's hands and sidled a smooth, almost unnoticed step forward; then another; then another. By the time the Romulan noticed the Vulcan again, Spock was almost halfway across the intervening space. The Romulan bellowed with rage and sprang to his feet, reaching for his weapon again.

Spock stood very still. Security looked to Kirk.

The woman put a restraining hand on the male's arm and said something quietly. It sounded like a plea. A tense moment dragged on, finally broken by Sulu's voice coming from the intercom.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Kirk thanked the gods - Human, Vulcan, or even Romulan - for the break in the tension, and answered the call. "What is it, Mr. Sulu?"

"A Romulan vessel, sir, at extreme range of sensors but heading this way very fast."

"What class?"

"Battle cruiser, sir."

/Here we go!/ thought Kirk. He paused. /Fight or run?/ Then he decided. He would take a chance. Neither.

"Head towards them, Mr. Sulu," he ordered. "Fastest possible speed."

All head turned towards him. There was silence on the intercom.

"Did you get that, Mr. Sulu?"

"Aye, sir." But there was a question in the reply.

"Let me speak to Lt. Uhura."

"Sir?"

"Lieutenant, all channels, loud as you can, blast friendship messages at them. Tell them we've rescued survivors from a Romulan trade craft, and that we wish to hand them over to their own people immediately. No conditions. Ask for transporter coordinates. Tell them to be prepared to beam over four of their people. Say that we'll come to a full stop at half the distance of their transporter range, this side of the border. Ask them to do the same their side. We'll drop shields for one minute at" he glanced at his wrist chrono, "0300 hours." He snapped off the intercom.

"Spock," Kirk ordered, "tell them what's happening. We've got twelve minutes to get them to the transporter room."

Spock began to speak rapidly and concisely in Romulan. When he had finished there was silence again. Kirk could see the struggle going on in the Romulan's mind. Here he was, in a totally alien situation, being asked to trust the beings he perceived as his captors. He was at war with himself, years of hating the Federation battling with his desire to save his family. Finally he turned towards the woman and they held a heated, but quiet discussion, all the time keeping a wary eye on the Enterprise personnel.

"Mr. Spock," nudged Kirk, "we have six minutes left."

Spock merely glanced over his shoulder and raised an eyebrow as if to say "You're telling ME the time?"

Finally the woman's insistence seemed to tip the balance. The father spoke one word. "Approach."

"At last!" sighed McCoy, starting forward.

"No!" Kirk pulled him back. "There's no time. We've got to get to the transporter room right now. Their own people will give them treatment."

The Romulan gathered his son in his arms and stood up quickly. Immediately he began to sway, his head wounds obviously troubling him. Kirk knew just enough Romulan to follow the conversation that took place next.

Spock took control. "You are weak," he said. "Let the woman take the tiny one, and I shall take the child. Can you manage without assistance?"

The Romulan drew himself up proudly and said, "Yes," as though he would, even if it cost him dearly.

Spock reached out and took the child from him. The sudden movement woke the boy, who to his horror found himself in the grasp of a Vulcan. He began to struggle and claw at Spock's hands until his father stepped forward and silenced him with a word.

The woman snatched the baby from the floor, and at a shambling run they all sped towards the transporter room, followed by McCoy and the Security team.

Kirk remained for a moment to call the bridge. "Response from the Romulan vessel?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir."

"What's our position?"

"Coming to a dead stop as directed, sir."

"And theirs?"

"The same, Captain."

Kirk almost jumped for joy. Was it going to work? Did he dare to hope?

"Be ready to drop shields on my command, for just one minute. And Mr. Sulu - when they've beamed their survivors over, snap those shields up and stand off at maximum speed. And I MEAN maximum, got that?"

"Aye, sir."

And Kirk ran for the transporter room.

He arrived just as the woman sat the baby on one of the circular pads. "Stay there," she said to her, then she and her husband took up their positions. Spock laid the injured boy down gently and backed away.

"Ready?" Kirk asked Jackson, who manned the transporter console.

"Ready, sir."

"Mr. Sulu, are both ships in position?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any communication?"

"Transporter coordinates coming in now."

"Give them to Mr. Jackson."

Kirk took a deep breath. Maybe - just maybe - this was going to work, he thought. He was either going to save the situation, or kill them all. "Drop the shields," he said.

Kirk felt, rather than heard, the drop in the hum of power as the Enterprise lowered her shields. "Energise."

The transporter beam sparkled.

Spock raised a hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper," he said.

But the Romulan male only growled as the family shimmered from view.

Kirk felt the power return to the shields, then they all staggered as the bottom seemed to drop out of the gravity and the Enterprise appeared to travel in sixteen different directions at once. Nausea affected all of them for a moment, and then came the familiar jolt as maximum speed was suddenly engaged. Gravity returned to normal, and they picked themselves up from around the room.

"What happened?" gasped McCoy. "Did they fire on us?"

"No," said Kirk, laughing. "I think Mr. Sulu all but looped the loop to get us out of there intact." He pulled down his rumpled shirt and pressed the intercom button. "Top marks for evasive manoeuvres, Helmsman. Report."

You could hear the smile in Sulu's voice as he said, "Romulans making off into their own territory at warp speed, sir. Almost as fast as we're going the other way. No damage reported."

"Any communication?"

"Just one thing," said Uhura. "but I'm not sure."

"Well, what?" Kirk demanded.

"Sir, I think they said..." and she hesitated. "I think they said 'Thank you.'"

Kirk, Spock and McCoy exchanged relieved glances. Kirk grinned and slapped McCoy playfully on the back. He didn't see Spock pick up a cloth from the open medi-kit and wipe the Romulan blood from his hands where it mingled, unnoticed, with his own, which seeped very gently from the scratches inflicted by the distraught Romulan child.

Kirk had solved the mystery, but not the problem. 'The Romulan child,' he had said, and they all knew what he meant instantly. He approached the transparent partition separating him from his friend in the isolation unit. McCoy noticed him willing himself not to reach out and touch it.

"Spock..." he said. The single sound carried a variety of tonal qualities which resonated through it. In that one word were contained many questions and many thoughts.

Spock, it appeared, understood all of them. He almost smiled. "I am not in distress, Jim. The disease is progressing, but only slowly. Now doubt the Doctor has much investigation he wishes to do, and will soon help me control the symptoms. There is no need for you to stay. It would be unwise for me to return to duty at the moment, as I may be contagious. It would be best if you return to the bridge, where you are most needed, and allow the Doctor to continue."

Kirk knew Spock was right. He glanced at McCoy, who was almost falling over himself with delight at the prospect of experiencing Spock's compliance for once. Kirk knew he would be in the way, but he still found it hard to leave.

Abruptly he tore his eyes away from the Vulcan and turned to go. He could have told McCoy, "Look after him," or "Do a good job," but he didn't need to say it. Instead he just rested a hand briefly on the Doctor's shoulder. "A full report as soon as you can, Bones," he said quietly, and left.

Kirk called a meeting of the senior officers and briefed them on the situation. He instructed them to work strictly on a 'need to know' basis with the rest of the crew; he knew that his people wouldn't panic - they were too well trained for that - but he didn't

want to cause them unnecessary worry about an unknown disease on the Enterprise.

"Any suggestions you can offer, gentlemen," he said as he dismissed them, "I'll be glad to listen."

Later that ship's evening Kirk had just gone off duty when there was a buzz at his door. It was McCoy. Kirk rose to greet him as he came in.

"Spock?" he asked, worried.

"Uh huh," McCoy nodded.

"Is he worse?"

"Sit down, Jim. Let's talk."

"Bones!" Kirk was impatient.

"Sit. He's okay for the moment."

Kirk sighed and poured them both a drink. They sat down opposite each other at his small table.

"Well?" Kirk asked when they were comfortable.

"I've released him from sickbay," McCoy reported.

Kirk was astonished. "Why?"

"I've been running further tests, Jim. He's not contagious to any Humans, or any other life form aboard this vessel."

"Well, all right," said Kirk. "Release him from isolation, then, but not from sickbay. Doesn't he need medical care?"

"Not strictly speaking, no."

Kirk frowned. McCoy picked up on his mood.

"Give me a chance to explain, Jim. Just listen. He's not contagious, so there's no point in keeping him in isolation. His actual physical condition is not that bad. We've come up with a cocktail of drugs that seem to have slowed the progress of the disease."

Kirk looked hopeful.

"No." McCoy shook his head. "Not stopped, just slowed. His lungs are very gradually becoming more congested, and his joints are slowly stiffening and swelling more and more, but he's managing to control his temperature and the pain of the stiffness. Of course he is tired, and I know he doesn't feel well, but you know what he's like - he doesn't say anything, or complain. He really doesn't require constant medical attention, and he knows that. As long as he comes to sickbay twice a day for his shots, I've said he can stay in his quarters."

Kirk didn't like it, and said so. McCoy smiled.

"Jim, you know Spock. He doesn't want to appear weak in public. You also know how much he values his privacy. If it would cause him extra distress to stay in a public and very busy place like sickbay, then I'm the last one who's going to force him to do so."

Kirk subsided. "You're right, Bones. I'm sorry." He thought for a while. "Is he fit enough for duty?"

"Light duty, yes, but not his usual twenty-four hour days or double shifts."

Kirk was still not satisfied. "What's the long term prognosis?"

McCoy shrugged and frowned. "I don't know, Jim. I have no knowledge on which to base it. The Enterprise computer doesn't have the programming to recognise Romulan diseases. If only we had a pint of Romulan blood, I could probably find enough antibodies to make up an antidote. I admit I don't know the course the disease will take, or even if it's fatal."

"Could he die?" Kirk was incredulous.

"Eventually, I suppose, yes, if his lungs get too bad or the fever increases."

There was silence.

"But what if he doesn't?" Kirk said, rising and pacing. "Are we saying he's doomed to a life of shortness of breath and gradually crippling bone disease? Starfleet would boot him out for medical reasons. He'd be destroyed."

"We could take him back to Vulcan," said McCoy quietly as Kirk stared at him. "They'd look after him there."

Kirk was stunned. "Bones, is it really going to be that bad?"

McCoy looked down. "I don't know, Jim. I just don't know."

Kirk went to Spock's cabin. Receiving no answer to his request for entry, he went in anyway. The cabin was full of the harsh red light which Spock found soothing. The temperature was turned up much too high for a Human. Kirk felt the sweat spring out all over his body the moment he stepped inside. The Vulcan must really be feeling the cold to turn up his environmental control so much, he thought.

"Spock?" he called softly.

There was no reply. Kirk peered round the door of the sleeping area. Spock lay stretched out on his couch, his eyes closed. Unusually for him, he wore a long loose robe.

Pulling up a chair Kirk sat beside his friend. Spock's breathing didn't sound right, and Kirk leaned forward to look at him more closely; as he did so Spock opened his eyes. Kirk was embarrassed to be caught staring, and with such obvious concern. He leaned back and looked away. There was silence for a moment.



Spock sat up and reached for the environmental control. Kirk couldn't believe it.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"You are uncomfortable, Captain. The cabin is too warm for a Human."

"Spock," Kirk said firmly, "leave it." And then more gently, "I can stand a little heat."

Spock made as if to speak, then reconsidered and lay down again, stiffly.

Kirk sat with him for a long time.

It was clear that there was nothing he could do for his friend, except perhaps give some comfort and companionship. When Spock finally appeared to be really asleep, Kirk returned to his own cabin, where he sat staring at the wall. His mind would not rest. He schemed and planned and hoped and imagined. All sorts of possibilities whirled through his head.

He kept harping back to that phrase McCoy had used. 'If only we had a pint of Romulan blood.' Yes, if only.

He imagined himself holding in his hand a small bottle, green liquid inside it. Such a small thing to want, yet it could save Spock's life, maybe even cure him. Where, in all the universe, could he get the one thing he wanted most, a pint of Romulan blood?

He thought about asking for it. Zoom up to the Romulan zone, park the Enterprise and wait. Then, when the Romulans came to investigate, simply ask, "Please sir, may I have some blood?" They wouldn't do it. He knew that for certain. They'd be suspicious, want to know why, and even if they believed him, would they care? Probably not. Would he do it himself if a Romulan vessel asked the same? He doubted it.

He thought about stealing it, infiltrating a hospital on a Rom planet and raiding the blood bank. A Starship couldn't get in, but maybe one man could, or two. Too dangerous. No way of getting there. Or more important, no way of getting back.

He thought about 'decanting' it. Sneak into the Rom zone, to a small outpost somewhere, kidnap a few Roms, remove some blood (with or without consent), return them and make a run for it before anyone could respond. But he couldn't do that either. It seemed immoral, somehow.

He laughed at himself. *You're going crazy*, he thought. Or desperate. If Starfleet knew what he was thinking they'd probably relieve him of duty straight away.

Starfleet! He agonised over the integrity of the situation. Here he was, desperately trying to think of a way to use the resources he had around him, to mobilise his Starship to do whatever was necessary. But did he have the right? The right to put his Starship - well, Starfleet's, actually - to such a personal use? To expose the crew to such danger for the sake of one man was insane.

But that man was his friend. Unlikely as it seemed, Kirk knew that if he put a daring plan to a vote on the ship, the answer would

be "Go!" Spock had a peculiar popularity and rapport with the crew. But Kirk knew that he couldn't - no, wouldn't - do anything like that. It didn't feel right. There had to be some other way.

Deep into the night he continued to agonise over the moral rights and wrongs of the personal use of Starfleet resources, and over the dilemma created by the lack of a pint of blood.

Early in the morning Mr. Scott presented himself at the Captain's cabin. Kirk was dressing and drinking coffee to try and refresh himself and stimulate his mind after his troubled night. He looked up in surprise when the Engineer walked in.

Although Scott was definitely part of Kirk's inner circle of advisers on the Enterprise, he rarely if ever came to the Captain's cabin. In fact, his appearance only served to highlight to Kirk that he might have been neglecting his colleague recently. When had he last invited Scott for drinks and a chat? He made a mental note to do so more often.

"What's up, Mr. Scott?"

"Captain, we have a major problem with the engines." Scott stood stiffly, almost to attention.

Kirk immediately became all business. "What's the matter?"

Scott came out with a string of highly technical and well-rehearsed phrases to account for the trouble, but halfway through the tirade Kirk held up a hand to stop him.

"What's the long and the short of it?" he asked.

"We have to shut down completely for two weeks."

Kirk was stunned. His mind, almost of its own accord, began to explore the implications. "Can't it wait until we get to the next Starbase?"

"No, sir. If they're not shut down within three days, I can't vouch for them ever firing up again to get us home. And," Scott continued before Kirk could say anything, "before we shut them down, and just after we fire them up again, we have to do two test runs each time, at warp 8 and for about an hour so that I can recalibrate them properly."

Kirk sat down with a tired sigh. "Run it down for me exactly," he instructed.

"Well," said Scott, relaxing a little, "first we do a test run at warp 8, any direction - say, over to that isolated Romulan outpost, for example." He waved a hand towards the ceiling. "We stop there for a minute or two, then warp back here and shut down for two weeks while I run repairs. At the end of a fortnight we warp over and back one more time, and we'll be away and running fine."

I'm being incredibly slow this morning, thought Kirk. It took a while to dawn on me - longer than usual to penetrate. He tried to be angry but couldn't, so he smiled instead. "Nice try, Scotty," he said, "but it won't work."

The Engineer drew himself up. "I don't know what you mean, sir," he said stiffly.

"Oh come on! I appreciate the gesture, but you've been discovered. Own up."

But strangely enough the Scot would not budge. He was quite adamant, and despite prodding, cajoling - and even some plain anger - on Kirk's part he stuck to his story and would not be moved.

Finally, Kirk almost began to believe him. Hands on hips, he faced the Engineer, eye to eye.

"Scotty, are you telling me the truth?" he demanded.

"Aye, Captain. That's the report that will go to Starfleet, and that's what I'm sticking to."

Kirk threw up his hands in exasperation, then pointed to the door. "Out!" he said.

Scott turned on his heel and left.

A chance. An opportunity. An offer not to be refused. A possibility; a gamble; a risk... But how to use it?

After a while the germ of an idea took seed in Kirk's mind and grew.

Chief Surgeon, Personal Log: Stardate 5240.4

He's crazy. They'll never get away with it. It's too dangerous. He's come up with a plan that's courageous and brilliant, yet astonishingly simple, as all the best plans are.

I'd better record it for posterity, because I don't think he'll dare to himself, and if the Romulans discover them we may not live to tell the tale.

Basically, the idea is this. I'll shape Jim's ears again to make him look Romulan, as I did before, and wrap his side in bandages soaked in green blood. We'll put him in one of the Romulan escape pods we've still got on the hangar deck; he'll be dressed like a travelling Prince on a personal quest. Spock will be in the other pod, posing as a physician and mystic acting as mentor to the Prince. Then we'll pack the pods with all the medical equipment they might need to draw blood to help the injured Prince, and then to process it, identify the disease, and manufacture an antidote and administer it.

When we warp over to the Romulan outpost we'll eject the two pods. The Enterprise will warp away to wait for two weeks while the pods land and pretend they've crashed. Spock will say their ship broke up during a pilgrimage.

They'll ask the resident Romulans for help - specifically, blood for transfusions. It has to be Kirk playing the

Prince because he can't speak Romulan, or handle the medical processes. Spock can do both, and if an injured Spock was seen up and about doing experiments, it would blow their cover.

They'll try to make out that the Prince is eccentric and keeps a vow of silence; also he will only allow his own physician to attend him.

Once they think they are accepted they can bandage Jim up nice and neat and clean while they work on the blood samples. Jim can play sick while the Romulans are watching, and when they're not he can help Spock.

Two weeks should be more than enough time for them to find antibodies if they're ever going to. When the Enterprise warps back and it comes time for their pick-up they plan to beam up when there's no-one around, then we run like hell.

It's so daft they might even get away with it. I've told them they mustn't do it.

But it may be Spock's only chance.

I've told them they're crazy.

I've told them to be careful.

I've told them I would give anything to be able to go with them!

The plan was so simple it almost worked.

Almost.

As the pod carrying Kirk approached the surface of the planet something in its inertial landing system failed. It hit a rocky outcrop on a sparsely wooded hillside, and sprang open with a resounding crack. Kirk was thrown almost thirty metres, tumbling over and over through the air as he went.

Two things probably saved his life. One was that he landed on one of the few trees, so that his fall was partly broken. He crashed through it, finally hitting the mossy ground flat on his back with a great thud.

The second factor was that he was already heavily bandaged and padded in preparation for his ruse with the Romulans. As he fell through the limbs of the tree one of the dead branches snapped and embedded itself in his left side. Its point tore right through fabric, bandaging, skin and finally the muscle of his ribcage; if it hadn't been for the tightly wound wadding his lung would probably have been punctured.

Kirk lay stunned for a few moments, gazing up at the sky, blinking rapidly in shock. It had all happened so fast that his mind needed time to catch up with events. In common with most people who experience an accident or injury, the tendency is to lie still and assess the damage.

After a minute or two he felt a little less disorientated and

raised his head to look around. He seemed to be almost at the top of a slope which was covered with moss and rocks and the occasional tree. The ground fell away to his left, and the trees became thicker at the bottom of the valley. Above him, some distance away, he could make out the remains of his escape pod.

Ah well, he thought, convincing emergency landing.

Remembering that he had someone to convince of something brought his mind back to the situation with a jolt. At the same time he became aware of distant voices.

Looking across to the opposite side of the valley he observed a group of three adult Romulans, two males and a female. They were pointing at Spock's pod, which lay a few paces from them. As he watched they moved towards it, picking their way over the rocks. Their excited voices carried to him easily on the still air. He estimated that he had about five minutes before they released Spock from his pod and made their way over to him.

Kirk attempted to lean up on his elbows to take a look at the damage to his ribcage. That was a mistake. Sharp pain stabbed through his side, and the world seemed to tilt beneath him. He flopped down again and gasped for breath. It wasn't that he had just discovered the broken branch protruding from his chest; he had really known it was there all along - he had just been putting off the inevitable moment when he would have to deal with it.

In the back of his mind, while looking around, he had also been deciding that he really had to remove that branch before Spock and the Romulans got to him. If they reached him while it was still in place they would see the red blood that was on it, and seeping into the lower layers of padding which was already stained with the fake green. He also knew he would have to dispose of the branch, throw it far away, in case they should inspect it.

He had an additional problem - he had to let Spock know that he was genuinely hurt so that the Science Officer didn't accidentally loosen the bandaging in making a show of examining him. But how could he tell him? Kirk didn't know enough Romulan or Vulcan to speak the necessary words, and he couldn't use Standard without giving them away.

Deal with that later, he told himself. One thing at a time. In the distance he could hear Spock's voice joining the others; time was running out.

Steeling himself he laid his head back, gritted his teeth, and with his right hand grasped the end of the branch where it protruded from his chest.

Do it now, he thought. Before you dwell on splinters and side branches, or thorns... Oh, God!

For a moment his courage failed him - this was probably the hardest thing he had ever had to do in his life. With a finger he tentatively wiggled the end of the branch and felt the other end move inside him; he didn't like the feeling.

Out! he said to himself. *Do it on the third out. Out, out, OUT!* And gripping it firmly he pulled with all his strength.

After the worst moments he could remember he found that he had

rolled slightly onto his left side in reaction to the pain.

Throw the branch, he told himself. *Come on, you're supposed to throw it*, and he wielded it experimentally in his hand. Then he laughed. He felt as though he could throw it ten centimetres. Maybe. If that.

A weakness was coming over him, and he grinned to himself, then wondered why he was finding all this so amusing. With a cold shudder he brought his mind back from the beginnings of wandering. He was aware that the weakness and lightheadedness were probably due to shock, pain and loss of blood. *Take action*, he thought. *Don't just lie there.*

Spock and the Romulans emerged from the trees below him. He estimated he had about two minutes left.

Still lying on his side he reached forward and used the branch to dig a shallow trench in the soil between two rocks, then he placed the piece of wood inside it and smoothed the earth over it with his hand.

Looking down at his side he realised that the moment he pulled out the offending branch he must have clamped his left hand over the padding and the injury, so that the spurt of blood that had accompanied the withdrawal of the sharp point had been largely absorbed. Lying on his side was also helping to put pressure on the wound.

Stay like this, he thought. *Stay like this and they won't see.*

Spock and the others approached. The Vulcan was climbing towards him, moving slowly, like an old man. Had the disease progressed so far that a gentle slope should have this effect?

Kirk knew from experience that he was going to become unconscious very soon; he could sense the greyness closing in around his vision, and noted the increased wooliness of his hearing, as though a distant roaring was coming closer.

One more thing to do.

Gambling everything, including their lives, he raised a hand and pointed at the Romulans, praying that although they might have heard Standard, French had never reached them. "Attention! Arrêtez vous!" he told them firmly. Then to Spock, "Je suis vraiment blessure!" He lowered his hand and passed out face downwards in the moss.

Kirk was having a dream. He dreamed that he was at home on the farm in Iowa, in his own bed. he was a teenager again. Something must be wrong, because he was very hot, and there was a fierce pain in his side, as if someone was poking at him with a sharp stick. He thrashed around, trying to make them stop, but the pain wouldn't go away. His mother came in and smiled at him, and asked if he was all right. He tried to tell her he wasn't, that he ached, and it hurt, and he was too hot, but try as he might he couldn't form any words. Over and over again he tried to speak to her, but nothing came out. He sat up in bed and clawed at his throat, but could find no injury.

All of a sudden he knew with certainty that this was a dream.

All he had to do to get out of it was to wake up. And he did so, snapping awake immediately.

He found himself sitting up in a bed, his hands at his throat. His side throbbed fearfully. Someone had removed most of his clothes. A drip feed led from a needle in his left arm to a bottle hanging on a hook above the bed. The covers someone had put over him were crumpled and sweaty.

Looking around he saw that he was in a bare but functional room, which was obviously part of a sickbay. A dim light enabled him to see.

There were three beds. He was in the middle one, facing the door. On his right, on the second bed, Spock lay asleep. On his left the third bed was covered with scientific equipment which clicked, whirred and bubbled away quietly to itself. The equipment overflowed the bed, and tubes and wires led to other machines in the corners. He recognised some of the equipment they had packed into the pods after removing any Federation markings from them. He observed a clear liquid moving from one part of the assembled paraphernalia to another with small, squirting spurts.

A part of Kirk's mind thought, *Our plan must be working; he's developing an antidote.* Another part of his mind thought how unusual it was for Spock to go to sleep and leave his Captain unattended. No sooner had he finished the thought than he chastised himself. What a selfish and uncharitable sentiment! Spock was sick, and had probably sat with him for ages before allowing himself to rest. Someone had obviously cared for his wounds and put him to bed; it couldn't have been the Romulans, or the hoax would have been discovered. It must have been Spock.

He lay back again and watched the Vulcan sleep for a moment, but it was no good - he simply had to know what was going on, where they were, and what the situation was.

"Spock!" He tried to call his First Officer, sorry to wake him but in desperate need of a report, but try as he might he could not form a word. Whatever he tried to say, nothing got any further than the intention to speak. He sat up again, feeling at his throat. There did not appear to be anything wrong.

But I dreamed this, he thought, fear beginning to well up inside him. *This can't be real - I woke up.* Again he tried to call Spock, and couldn't.

Abject panic, brought on by his weakened and feverish state, seized Kirk and propelled him from the bed over to Spock's side. He shook him desperately, his lips forming the words "Spock! Spock!" over and over again.

Spock awoke at once. Even in his ill state there was no lingering, woozy awakening as there is with most Humans; he was instantly alert, and assessing the situation. He saw his Captain, obviously in distress, half leaning on the bed at his side, one hand clawing at his own throat, and the drip feed, ripped out by the sudden movement, dangled free and left a trickle of red blood to flow down Kirk's arm.

Spock sat up stiffly but quickly. His eyes flicked to the door to check that it was firmly locked. In the same moment he caught Kirk's wrists and removed his hands from his throat before he could

do any damage.

"I have paralysed your speech centres," he explained. "I could not risk that you would call out while in a fever. I was not able to watch over you all the time. It is a simple and temporary condition, requiring only a light meld to create or dissolve it." He let go of Kirk's wrists. "Do you understand?"

Kirk nodded with relief. The assurance that emanated from the Vulcan's aura of self control did as much to calm him as the words he spoke. Kirk suddenly found himself having to lean heavily on the Vulcan's bed for support. His breath came in short gasps and he shivered; he really didn't feel very well at all.

Spock helped him up and supported him back to his own bed. Kirk indicated that he wanted to sit up rather than lie down, so Spock fluffed up the pillows, and after lowering Kirk onto the bed he straightened the covers. Having noticed the shivering he fetched another blanket and draped it around the Human's shoulders; he then cleaned up the puncture wound in Kirk's arm and reconnected the drip.

Kirk was impatient to get his voice back, and after smiling a thank-you for the care, gestured to his throat and temples.

Spock sat down on the side of the bed to prepare himself for the meld, then hesitated.

Kirk raised his eyebrows in a 'What?'

Spock seemed to consider for a moment, then got up and stood stiffly beside the bed. "Captain, I have to tell you something which will probably make you quite..." and he looked at the floor, "... furious."

Kirk wasn't sure whether to be angry, or to laugh. Here was his Vulcan friend deliberately not restoring his powers of speech, so that he could not shout at him. He gestured impatiently, a 'Come on - get on with it' sign.

"As you wish," said Spock. "It has been thirty-six hours since we landed. So far, our deception has worked. They have accepted you as a renegade Prince on a personal quest, and myself as a mystic and Healer. We are in their camp, which is inhabited by twenty adults and six children. They have extended us every courtesy. This room is for our private use - no-one enters unless I allow it.

"Your use of French was an inspiration, and I congratulate you on your speed of thought. They did not understand it. I told them it was an ancient language of prayer, and they have accepted this. I was able to conceal your injury, and have brought you to their sickbay without arousing suspicion.

"If the present situation continues, we shall rendezvous with the Enterprise as arranged in twelve days time."

Spock paused. Kirk was sending 'So what's the problem? Why am I going to be furious?' signals.

"Captain, you were quite seriously injured. You have many cuts, bruises and sprains, two cracked ribs and a concussion. Most importantly, you have lost a great deal of blood..." Spock tailed off.

Kirk's eyes went to the machines quietly plopping away around him, to the drip feed in his arm, then to the bottle of plasma hanging above him. His mind formed the words he would have spoken if he could. *You've been using the machines to manufacture synthetic Human plasma for me, haven't you, instead of searching for an antidote for yourself?* He looked pointedly at Spock.

"Yes, Captain," said the Vulcan, as though he had heard the words. "There was no other way. I considered many plans for obtaining some Human blood, but could find only one solution. You might otherwise have died."

Kirk was, indeed, furious, but there was nothing he could say - it was the only logical solution. But that didn't mean he liked it, or its implications, any better. He closed his eyes for a moment.

Spock stepped up to him and touched him gently on the shoulder. "Are you all right?"

Kirk nodded, then pointed to his throat again. Spock nodded in return, sat on the edge of the bed, and pushed him back against the pillows.

"Close your eyes," he said.

Kirk did so, and felt Spock's fingers rest gently on his face. No words were spoken, but in a moment he felt something subtle change in his mind, and he knew he could speak again.

As Spock withdrew his hand this time it was Kirk who caught the Vulcan by the wrist. "How are you?" he asked.

Spock politely removed himself from Kirk's grip. Kirk knew that this was not because he found the contact distasteful, but because when he was ill he found it harder to screen out the intensity of Human emotion.

"I will admit I am in some difficulty," Spock told him. "Dr. McCoy's drugs help to slow the progress of the disease, and I have a good supply of them left. My major discomfort is the stiffness in my joints, which impedes swift movement. Occasionally the congestion in my lungs causes hardship in breathing, but I am managing fairly well."

"We make a sorry pair," Kirk said, and looked around. "How long before we can start work to help you? I can survive now. We ought to start searching for an answer straight away."

"This," and Spock indicated the set-up surrounding them, "will be the last synthetic plasma I need to manufacture for you. Tomorrow I can begin to search for an antidote. The Romulans asked me what blood group you were; that was almost my undoing, as I did not know the names of the Romulan blood groups. I replied that fortunately you were of the most common kind. Six of the adults here have assured me that they are of that group, and they have all agreed to be donors. I have taken two pints already - I had to pretend I used it for you. I believe I can take one more pint each day for the next four days without arousing suspicion. Blood does not keep, but I can search for the antibodies in each pint as it is given."

Kirk smiled. "You seem to have everything well in hand. As far as I'm concerned, the sooner we start the better." Then, as an

afterthought, "It's probably a good thing I didn't yell at you. I don't think I'd have had the energy." Suddenly feeling completely drained he winced and clutched at his side, then slid his fevered body down into a lying position.

Spock became all business. "I should change the dressing," he decided.

Kirk lay still and yielded to Spock's ministrations. Normally in complete control of himself and his body, it felt very strange to allow someone else to do something so personal for him. He watched as the Vulcan administered a pain killer, removed the soiled dressings, and with meticulous care in his long thin fingers began to clean the wound again.

Kirk was overcome by the incredible gentleness apparent in the controlled strength of the Vulcan. He knew that his First officer had the strength to break a man's neck if he wanted to, yet here he was displaying a remarkable lightness of touch. He scanned Spock's face, watching the slight frown that drew his eyebrows together as he concentrated on his task.

Spock glanced up to check that he wasn't causing any distress, and caught his Captain looking at him.

Suddenly Kirk couldn't bear the tenderness any more. He turned his head away and flung an arm up over his eyes.

Spock stopped and became very still. He knew he hadn't hurt his Captain, but he could see that there was something wrong. With rapid movements he deftly finished what he had to do and put down the remaining bandages and instruments. He didn't know exactly what the problem was, and he didn't understand if he had done anything wrong, but he did know that there were some Human emotions that he would never understand.

Swiftly and silently, he left the room.

The next three days slipped into a sort of pattern. Their accommodation was comfortable, with an adjoining bathroom and everything they could need in terms of medical equipment. The Romulans provided food, which they left at the door twice a day. Although unusual, it was palatable, and helped to relieve some of the boredom. Kirk never once ventured outside. They both considered it too risky. He would have loved to explore the settlement and the surrounding landscape, but at first he was too weak, and after that it was plainly unwise.

Spock showed him many small kindnesses, always making sure he was comfortable and that he had everything he needed. It was the Vulcan way. He was what he was; there was no other way he could be.

Spock ventured out occasionally, to take more blood from the donors and presumably to reassure the settlement that everything was progressing well, and that the 'Prince' would survive until the next transport ship passed by.

Only once did Kirk meet any of the Romulans. As a courtesy to their hosts Spock arranged for the adults to come and look in on Kirk one day. Kirk pretended to be in a religious trance. The Romulans filed in, gazed at him in awe, and withdrew quietly after

several minutes. Immediately after they had left Spock sank weakly into a chair. The effort of maintaining normality in their presence was obviously becoming increasingly difficult.

On Kirk's insistence Spock began his experiments as soon as there was no more need for plasma. He worked for several hours each day, isolating antibodies and comparing them to those found in his own blood.

As Kirk gradually got better he took over some of the experimental work from Spock. He watched the Vulcan carefully for signs of excessive distress or fatigue. Kirk knew that the Science Officer had overtaxed himself during the last few days; he had not dared to leave any nursing to the Romulans in case they should see red blood. Once or twice Kirk found him coming to a complete standstill in his work, gazing ahead, waiting for some energy to return so that he could continue. On those occasions Kirk would insist that Spock lie down and rest.

Once Kirk woke in the night to find Spock sitting up on the edge of his bed and experiencing great difficulty in breathing. Kirk fetched him some oxygen, and in a few moments his respiration was back to normal.

"You should have woken me," Kirk scolded.

"It would have served no purpose," the Vulcan replied. "These spasms pass quickly."

The comment indicated to Kirk that the spasm he had witnessed was not the first; thereafter he kept an even closer guard on his friend.

On the third day Spock announced - unemotionally of course - that he had identified the antibody they had been searching for. By the end of the day he had made up a small phial containing a concentration of it. He injected some of it into his bloodstream so that his body could begin to pattern its own defences.

The next day he injected more of the same. By that evening it became clear that the crisis had passed, and that the antibodies, combined with McCoy's drugs, were slowly but surely beginning to take effect. Blood tests proved that the disease was regressing. The prospect of continued treatment boded well for Spock's complete recovery.

Each day Spock changed Kirk's dressings and carefully burned the soiled bandages in a fume cupboard to eliminate any evidence of red blood. Gradually the wound in Kirk's side began to close.

Each day Kirk watched while Spock injected himself with more antidote and medicine. Kirk made him rest a lot. Gradually, they both began to recover.

On the eighth day of their stay on the planet, when they were both somewhat recovered, Kirk woke to find a heavily armed Rihansu warrior standing in the doorway of their room. Strangely enough he felt no fear or surprise, but sighed heavily. The phrase 'The best laid plans of mice and men' ran through his mind. They had gambled, and they had lost. It had been worth the try.

He attempted once more to bluff it out. He sat up stiffly, pretending to be offended at having been disturbed, and growled as if with anger in the Romulan fashion as he gestured for the guard to leave.

It didn't work. Snarling two words in Standard, "Human," and "Imposter", the warrior grabbed Kirk's arm and dragged him unceremoniously from the bed, shoving him through the door into the corridor then out into the daylight.

It was the first time Kirk had seen the Romulan outpost, but he didn't have the chance to take much in. He registered a cluster of rectangular modern huts around a paved compound, and hills all around the settlement. In the middle of the compound stood three more warriors, weapons trained on Spock.

Kirk cursed to himself. Somehow he had hoped that the Vulcan would be safe. Around them the Romulan inhabitants stood stone-faced and unmoving. Kirk could imagine their anger at having been used and deceived. He knew they couldn't possibly realise the true reason their blood had been wanted; they were probably visualising all sorts of horrific experiments which they imagined being designed by their enemy the federation to destroy their race.

We'll be lucky if they don't kill us, thought Kirk.

But that was not the apparent intention. Kirk was pushed to stand next to Spock, while the warriors spoke among themselves in rapid Romulan.

"I'm sorry, Jim," said Spock. "I didn't have a chance. They materialised right next to me."

Kirk noticed the avoidance of the title 'Captain', or even 'sir'. *Correct procedure,* he thought. *Never give away to an enemy the rank or even the relative seniority of the crew.* "Information?" he asked.

Spock spoke quietly and quickly. "From their conversation I understand that they are crew from a small patrol vessel. They found us by pure chance. They were cruising with full scanners on when they picked up a Vulcan and a Human reading. The rest is obvious." Spock thought for a moment, and then continued. "They have not realised our identity - they think of us simply as Federation spies. It appears their intention is to hand us over to the authorities at the first available opportunity. They do not seem to think their find is important."

Further conversation became impossible. They were approached by a warrior who threw them both a suit, rather like a jump suit but quilted and warm. One of the women handed each of them a bottle of water. Before they could wonder why, a transporter beam snatched them from the planet.

Materialising on a pad in a small transporter room on the Romulan patrol ship, they were met by armed guards and marched just a few metres along a cramped walkway to the bridge of the vessel. Here they were shown to a Romulan who was obviously the Captain.

Busy with his work, he paid them little attention. Glancing at them, he gave a few orders and waved a dismissal. They were then

taken down into what appeared to be the brig; they were shoved through a doorway and a strong force field was activated across the entrance. The guards departed, and they were left with just the small room and the noise of the engines as the craft powered away to continue its journey.

Basically, they were forgotten about. It seemed that no-one was interested in them. No-one came to see them, or interrogate them, or feed them.

The cell was very basic, about four metres long and three metres wide. It was just high enough to stand up in, and was painted plain metallic grey all over. The force field at the door cast quite a bright light, enough to see by. An alcove at the opposite end of the room served as a bathroom. At least there was running water, though it only trickled slowly and tasted of metal. They did have the bottles of water given to them on the planet, but set these aside in case the supply failed.

There was absolutely no furniture. They had the suits they had been given, but the room was not particularly cold, so they sat on them instead.

It took about two minutes to explore their new home. After that they waited for something to happen, but nothing did. It soon became apparent that they would be left to their own devices until their destination was reached, and they had no idea how long that would be.

They speculated on their position, and the possible outcome. Their original objective had - they hoped - been achieved. Although they had no drugs with them they assumed that Spock's condition would continue to improve, albeit at a slower rate.

It took them only a few minutes more to conclude that there was no escape from the cell. As it was solid metal, with only one entrance, there was no possibility of digging their way out. They tried taking the taps apart to have something to throw into the force field to short it out, but the field was strong and the small pieces of metal had no effect. They threw some water on it, but that didn't work either.

They wondered about the direction the vessel was taking. As far as they were able to tell, no special journey was being made to drop them off. The ship appeared to be continuing to patrol along the edge of the Neutral Zone, but they had no way of knowing for sure; for all they knew they could be travelling deep into Romulan space.

At the start of their captivity there were still six days left until their rendezvous with the Enterprise. They might be speeding further and further from that point. What would Scott do when he arrived at the planet and found them gone? they wondered.

Their two biggest problems became hunger and boredom.

Kirk spent some time banging on the wall next to the door and shouting for food, or just for someone to come. Either they were not heard, or they were ignored, for no-one came and no-one passed

by.

Kirk's unoccupied mind began to do sums in his head. A pound of fat is equal to three thousand six hundred calories. An average person needs about two thousand calories a day just to live. If they take in more they gain weight; if they take in less, they lose it. At the moment he was taking in zero calories. Even without exercise Kirk reckoned that at that rate he would lose about a pound every two days. Probably more to start with. McCoy would be pleased, he thought, and smiled to himself. Then he remembered that he would probably never see McCoy again. He shook the thought off and his mind changed direction. He knew the equation for Humans; what about Vulcans?

The first twenty-four hours were the worst. His stomach growled when it was time for a meal; he shrugged, and smiled an apology at Spock. After eighteen hours, the stomach cramps began to get really bad; he lay on his back trying to doze and ignore them, but not really succeeding. Spock was sitting next to him, and Kirk became hazily aware that the Vulcan was stealthily reaching out a hand to touch him. He sat up abruptly, and Spock froze in mid movement.

Kirk knew that Spock was hoping to meld lightly with him and take away some of his discomfort. "No!" he said forcefully, shaking his head.

"Why not?" countered Spock, folding his arms in what might or might not be a slight sulk at having been discovered. "It is illogical to suffer when it can be stopped with very little effort."

"What about you?" Kirk asked. "You're hungry too."

Spock considered his reply. "Yes, but I am used to fasting. I can control it." He looked at Kirk. "Let me help you."

"No," said Kirk again. "Just, no. I can't explain it, but we're in this together, and it seems wrong somehow." And he lay down again.

When he was asleep, Spock did it anyway.

After twenty-four hours the pains were gone, and there was just weakness. And boredom.

Boredom, boredom, boredom.

After five days, Kirk was going stir-crazy. Usually a very active person, he found it extremely hard to cope with enforced inactivity.

They did a lot of talking. Soon they had discussed every topic under the sun, and many that were above it too. They debated politics, history, religion, literature, history, racism, crime, and a whole variety of other subjects too.

Kirk taught Spock how to play 'I spy'. That was great fun! Wall. Force field. Bottle. Floor. Yet it was amazing how many things they came up with. Spock found the childish game interesting. He liked Twenty Questions even better. He guessed all Kirk's puzzles at about the third attempt, while Kirk struggled

through and gave up on most of his. But it kept them sane.

They even played chess with no pieces, holding the game in their minds. After four or five days, though, they gave that up because Kirk was becoming increasingly light headed and couldn't concentrate long enough to visualise the pieces or finish a game; he kept drifting off in the middle.

If Spock had been alone he probably would have coped by meditating or going into a trance. Kirk knew this, and felt guilty at preventing the Vulcan from doing so. He knew that Spock kept aware simply to help him deal with his own inactivity.

At first Kirk kept apologising. Sorry for my stomach growling. Sorry for not being able to concentrate on chess. Sorry, I need you to stay awake with me, and not meditate. Spock would simply raise an eyebrow. Eventually they hardly needed to say anything any more. The air was full of unspoken conversations. In one moment a whole exchange could take place without a word being uttered.

Kirk's stomach would growl, or he would lose concentration, and he would look at Spock as if to say, 'I'm sorry.' Spock's raised eyebrow would answer, 'You don't need to be. It's not your fault; it is illogical to apologise for something you can't help.' Kirk's look would say, 'Yes, I know, but allow me the Human indulgence of apologising. It's natural for me - if I try not to, it's worse.' And Spock's gentle smile would say, 'All right, I'll let you.'

If anyone had been watching they might have wondered how it was that each seemed to know exactly what the other was thinking. When things were really bad, thought Kirk, it was surprising how little needed to be said between people who were really close; there was just a total knowledge of the situation which neither needed to voice, a shared anxiety and suffering. He smiled and lay down to try once again to go to sleep, but found it really difficult.

Spock watched his Captain trying to sleep. He sat and considered the situation. In himself he was actually feeling a lot better than he had done for a long time. The disease was definitely almost gone, and fasting was no great hardship to him. He was slightly weak from lack of food, but that was compensated for by the fact that his mind was at a very high pitch of efficiency. The fasting, the simple games, the lack of any real problems to concentrate on, had all combined to hone his mind to a finely tuned level.

His biggest worry was the state of his friend. He had resolved about two days ago to try to do something to deliver them from this situation. Knowing that the Enterprise was going to be in this general area the following day, he had to act now. His plan had two simple parts. Get out of the room. Take over the ship.

When they had first been captured he had observed during his brief walk from the transporter room to the bridge and then to the cell that there was a crew of about twelve. Stealth, surprise, and the capture of a few arms might just make it possible to take over the ship, but the first obstacle was the greatest, getting out of the cell.

The decision to act having been made, he immediately rose and moved next to the door. The panel which controlled the force field had to be beside the door on the other side of the metal wall. Once

before he had influenced a guard's mind to open a door. This time, there was no guard. This time he would have to try to influence the electronic circuitry in the control panel. This would not be an easy task.

Spock was a telepath of limited ability. He was by no means a telekinetic, yet long ago, while training as a youth on Vulcan, he had managed on several occasions to make small objects move without touching them. It required intense concentration, and took a long time.

Well, thought Spock, I have nothing but time.

But first, he turned to his Captain. If they did succeed in breaking out, they would need all their strength to battle for control of the ship. He watched Kirk for a moment, then knelt beside him. Reaching out a hand he extended his fingers and very softly, a little at a time, he eased Kirk's weakness and anxiety by extending a relaxation through him and finally willing him to sleep.

At one point Kirk smiled, and Spock was sure that his Captain sensed him and this time accepted the offered help, smiling a thank you and slipping into a much needed, deep and restful sleep. When Spock was satisfied he nodded to himself and returned to the door.

Spock could locate the control panel because being Vulcan he could see the magnetic field it generated, even through the wall of the cell. The image he observed also gave him an idea of the design of the panel. Force field controls only came in a few forms, even in Romulan designs; the principles of physics were the same.

Spock thought he knew which particular microcircuit he would have to detach; he rubbed his hands together as a gesture of preparation for the task ahead, then reached out and placed a hand over the back of the panel. He cleansed his mind and began to work on the problem.

For over an hour he stood immobile, barely breathing as he strained with intense concentration to move the tiny object. Abruptly he moved away from the door. This wasn't working. He was too anxious. He found himself thinking as much about their need to make the door inactive as he was about the actual mechanism. It was not good enough; he had to clear his mind further.

He raised his hands and massaged his face as if washing it. This was a gesture of weakness, he thought, and was glad there was no-one there to witness it. But gladness was an emotion, he chided himself; he decided that he must be getting tired. He glanced at Kirk, assuring himself that the Captain still slept, then composed himself for the effort to try again.

Returning to his position by the door he cleared his mind completely of everything but the task in hand, then mustered all his considerable strength to increase his powers. The strain was visible, although no-one saw it. He exerted every mental ability he had in one concerted, supreme effort.

There! The chip moved. The door frame flashed with a surge of power, and then the force field was gone.

Spock slid down the wall in the sudden darkness and sat taking deep breaths to still his shaking fingers. After a few moments he got up and went over to Kirk.

Squatting down next to him he hesitated for a moment, reluctant to bring him back from his rest, back to increased hunger, weakness and anxiety, but he knew that they had a chance to act, and it had to be now or never. He shook Kirk gently to wake him.

"Spock?" Kirk asked quietly; for some reason the darkness made him whisper.

"Yes, Captain. The force field is no longer functioning. We should take this opportunity to leave."

"What did you do?" Kirk asked as Spock helped him to his feet and guided his hand to the wall to help him get his bearings.

"I shall explain it to you in detail later, Captain. Put simply, I caused the mechanism to short out by making part of the circuitry move from its normal position."

I'll bet you did, thought Kirk, but he didn't pursue it for the moment.

They slipped quietly out into the dimly lit corridor. There was no time to discuss a plan. The objective was obvious: try to overpower as many guards as possible, and take control of the ship.

The first three Romulans they came across were easy. They were not expecting to be attacked in the security of their own vessel, so they were not alert. Kirk distracted them while Spock came up from behind and applied a nerve pinch. Within half an hour they had tied up and hidden the three crew members, armed themselves, and had even stolen a communicator.

The three crew had been on minor duties around the ship, but Kirk and Spock knew they had to act swiftly before any of them were missed.

Kirk pointed downwards. "Off duty personnel next," he suggested.

Spock nodded and they made their way down to the cramped crew quarters. Within minutes two more Romulans were inoperative and firmly tied before they even knew what had hit them.

"Five down, about seven to go," Kirk calculated.

They had done the easy bit. Even armed it would be difficult to try to overpower the seven crew in the bridge area all at once.

On their way up they passed a communications console; Spock called Kirk back and drew his attention to it.

"I can send a signal to the Enterprise," he said. "Loud, clear and directional, to continue until someone stops it. It will, however, probably be monitored by our captors."

Kirk considered briefly. Sending a cry for help was a good idea. If they failed to overpower the rest of the crew, then at least Scott would know where they were. On the other hand, if triggered the signal could cause them to be discovered. They might do better to wait until they had control of the ship. In the end they combined a little of both.

"Send it!" Kirk ordered, and Spock did.

They lay in wait for the crew member they correctly anticipated would be sent down from the bridge to investigate. More wary this time, this one was on the alert, and was not so easy to capture. The Romulan weapon had no stun setting, and Kirk and Spock were reluctant to kill unless it was absolutely necessary for the preservation of their own lives. They overcame him with brute force, jumping on him suddenly and battling it out until Spock could get the right grip.

But the noise of the fight brought the rest of the crew running.

To give credit where it was due, although it was a small ship the Captain seemed to be efficient and the crew well trained and organised. And very aggressive. Stealth and slyness had been Kirk and Spock's best weapons; once they found themselves on the defensive from an all-out attack on their position behind the communications console, they were clearly outnumbered.

No traveller in space will readily discharge a weapon inside a vessel. Damage could rupture the integrity of the hull and have all aboard in vacuum within seconds. Faced with no alternative, Kirk and Spock resorted to firing weapons, and drew fire in return.

In the confined space, soon full of smoke, explosions and shouting, despite the fact that they put up a very good fight in their weakened state, they were eventually overpowered.

The last thing Kirk remembered was receiving a severe blow to the head as someone or something struck him from the left, and he went out like a light.

When Kirk regained consciousness he was lying on his side with his hands tied behind his back and his legs tied at the ankles. He was on a metal floor, and even though it was completely dark he could tell that he was in an enclosed space. He thought he was probably back in the same cell. Their bid for freedom having failed, it seemed they had been unceremoniously dumped back into the brig, only this time they had been tied up to prevent any further escape attempt. Kirk could sense that he was not alone in the room, that someone lay on the floor behind him. He knew that it was Spock, and called out, but receiving no reply assumed that the Vulcan was unconscious.

Kirk's head hurt too much to move about a lot, so for a little while he just lay there and waited to recover. He was very uncomfortable. The room seemed stuffier than before, and the lack of oxygen made his thumping headache seem much worse.

He had no idea how long he lay there drifting in and out of consciousness, but it couldn't have been much later that he heard a change in the Vulcan's breathing and knew that Spock was awake.

"Spock?"

"I am awake, Captain. I take it you are also firmly tied?"

"Yes, I am. I've tried loosening it, but it seems to be made of something very strong, and I'm not having much success." He paused. "Do you think we're back in the same cell?"

There was a short delay before Spock replied, as though he was taking stock of the situation. Finally he answered, "I do not believe so, Captain. There is no light, so there is no force field. It seems from the sound quality that this room is smaller, and there is a solid door, which is closed. That would explain the lack of ventilation."

Wonderful! thought Kirk. *Maybe we've been put in some cargo hold and left to suffocate.* But all he said was, "Do you think you could untie my hands?"

"I believe that may be possible," Spock replied. "If you could move a little closer?"

Kirk wriggled across the floor until his hands came up against the Vulcan's back. With a heave Spock pulled himself up to a sitting position and began to feel the bonds that secured Kirk's hands. For some time his fingers seemed just to explore the twisting and turning of the knots and loops; finally, however, he carefully began to pick away at what Kirk supposed was the first knot in the necessary sequence.

Kirk tried to control his patience. His headache was a little better, but he really wanted to be free to move about. Spock seemed to work and work, yet be rewarded by very little progress.

After a while Kirk's impatience got the better of him, and he asked as matter-of-factly as he could manage, "How's it going?"

"Slowly," was the only reply.

Spock continued to work away in the darkness and the silence. Eventually one of the knots parted and the bonds on Kirk's hands loosened slightly, but he was still not completely free.

A few moments later Spock stopped picking at the bonds, and Kirk sensed him lie down.

"What is it?" asked Kirk. "Why did you stop?"

There was no answer. More urgently, Kirk called, "Spock?"

The reply came weakly. "Captain, I am somewhat fatigued. If you will permit it, I will rest for a moment before continuing."

Alarm bells rang in Kirk's brain and brought him sitting up instantly. Something was wrong. Spock, with his super-human strength, never got that tired. Or was it the disease again?

It suddenly and belatedly occurred to Kirk that although he had taken his fair share of knocks and bruises from their encounter with the Romulan crew, he hadn't even considered the possibility that Spock might be injured. Yet here he was, lying around letting Spock do all the work.

He twisted around and leaned across Spock, attempting to peer over his shoulder in the darkness. "What's the matter? What is it?"

But even as he spoke his nostrils crinkled at a smell which once encountered was never forgotten: blaster burned flesh.

Why, oh why hadn't he noticed it before?

"How bad is it?" he asked.

Again, Spock took some time in replying. "The damage is not particularly serious. Both shoulders, my upper back, and my left arm. No third degree burns, mostly first and second degree."

"Bastards!" exclaimed Kirk. "They didn't even give you any medical attention!" He kicked at the wall in anger.

"Captain..." Spock began.

"Yes, I know. It won't do any good to shout."

He didn't bother to ask if the burns were very painful; he knew what phaser burns felt like, and imagined that these were similar. He knew Spock would be controlling the pain as best he could. Kirk determined to free their bonds. At least then Spock would be more comfortable. Trust the proud, stubborn Vulcan not to say anything.

Kirk turned his back on Spock and began to work on the knots which secured the First Officer's hands. It took a long time. He was hot, thirsty, short of air, and very, very tired, but eventually he was rewarded by the parting of the bonds, and Spock's hands were free.

Spock sat up, obviously with some effort, and after waiting until the circulation had returned to his fingers, worked on Kirk. The moment they were both free they untied their own feet. They didn't have the energy to talk, but struggled on in the heat and the closeness and the silence. Finally, both free, they stretched out on the floor, Kirk on his back and Spock on his front, and rested.

It grieved Kirk that he could offer his friend no comfort. They had no water, no food, and by the feel of it, very little air. Not for the first time Kirk wished that he could mind meld, so that he could at least take away some of his friend's pain.

They lay there, exhaustion and hunger taking its toll.

The Enterprise made its dash towards the Romulan planet as arranged. The engines having been 'fixed', Mr. Scott brought her in fast. All scanners were set to search ahead for sensor readings of the Captain and First officer, ready to feed the coordinates to the computer the moment they were known.

But there were no Human or Vulcan readings to be found.

After initial disbelief and near panic, a grim quietness descended on the bridge. Either Kirk and Spock were dead, or they were somewhere out there, captured and being taken deep into the heart of the Romulan Empire.

McCoy, now on the bridge, and Scott in the command chair, exchanged glances. They did not need to debate the problem. All the crew knew that to stay and search was risky in case they were detected and an armed fleet was sent to intercept them, precipitating an interplanetary incident, but they couldn't bring themselves to leave.

Fate, however, decreed that the dreadful decision would never have to be made, because at that moment Uhura picked up a Federation

distress code which blasted through her console from somewhere out in space. Reporting it instantly, she set her instruments to track it. The signal was transmitted for about seven minutes before it was cut off abruptly in a burst of static; but it was long enough for them to get a good fix on its position.

"Travelling away from us," reported Chekov, head bent over the science station. "About five hours away at maximum warp, along the edge of the Zone."

McCoy heaved a sigh. "I don't know how they do it," he said aloud. In his mind he added, *Just hang on - we're coming to get you.*

The Enterprise shot out of the Romulan Zone, then turned almost at right angles to parallel the edge of it. At full speed the huge ship hurtled after its receding quarry.

In the end the same factors that had delivered them into peril worked to provide their salvation.

Scanning ahead, the superior sensors of the Enterprise picked up the small patrol vessel and then the life readings of the missing men long before the enemy ship was even aware of her.

Creeping up on the Romulan's tail Scott brought the ship just into transporter range, which Chekov calculated was just outside the range of the small ship's sensors. The crew of the Enterprise prepared to drop shields and bring their colleagues safely home.

Despite desperate exhaustion and their physically poor state Kirk and Spock lay and examined possibilities for another attempt at escape. Too tired even to talk to each other, their minds wandered on plots to open metal doors, to get home somehow.

Never give up, thought Kirk. There's always a chance - something's bound to happen.

The first they knew of their rescue was when the air around them began to tingle and shimmer in the darkness. Kirk just had time to reach over and grasp Spock's arm, then the transporter room of the Enterprise took shape around them.

McCoy didn't like what he saw.

Emergency medical teams whisked Kirk and Spock to sickbay. First aid was the most urgent priority, and they were rapidly given oxygen, water, and pain killers. When they had been stripped and cleaned up, their injuries and malnutrition were even more apparent.

McCoy and M'Benga set to work to deal with Kirk's head wound and the injury to his side, and Spock's burns. On McCoy's instructions M'Benga also took blood from Spock to test if the disease was still present. Within three hours they were as comfortable as modern medicine could make them.

McCoy put Kirk to bed for several days. No metallic blankets in sickbay, though - the doctor kept one or two rooms specially made up with good old-fashioned pillows and warm quilts. The

psychological effects of snuggling, after an ordeal, were well known to him.

Kirk made no protest. For once he was just glad to rest and take long, hot baths, and eat to replenish his strength. McCoy sat and listened and talked with him for hours. As usual, Kirk was very anxious about Spock.

"Please look after him," he kept saying.

This was something which had initially worried McCoy too. After having treated Kirk he had gone next door to see how M'Benga was getting on with Spock, only to find that the Vulcan had insisted on returning to his own quarters. McCoy was all set to bluster off after him when M'Benga stopped him.

"It's natural for Vulcans who live among non-Vulcans to want to be alone when they are weak. The strain of keeping us all shielded out it hard enough when they are fit, let alone under these circumstances. He's a lot better off where he is."

But McCoy still didn't like it. Kirk had said, 'Look after Spock,' but how were you supposed to give comfort to a Vulcan?

For Kirk, McCoy knew that good food, rest and the care of a friend would work wonders, but he couldn't imagine the same being true for Spock.

What do Vulcans do to help each other after an ordeal? he wondered. He didn't know. *Be logical,* he thought. *Go and ask.*

So he did. He called at Spock's cabin and was invited in.

Spock was sitting on a seat just inside the door, as if he had just walked in and sat down where the nurse who had accompanied him to his room had left him. McCoy wondered if he had interrupted a meditation. He wasn't sure what to say, so he began in what he hoped was a Vulcan way.

"It is my duty to see that you are healing, and have everything you need."

Spock looked up. "Thank you, Doctor." His eyes were slightly glazed.

McCoy stepped nearer and ran a quick scan. "I'd rather have you in sickbay," he began, but when he felt Spock stiffen he continued, "but I'm sure you'd prefer to be in your own rooms."

Spock seemed to relax.

"The tests show that the infection is virtually gone," McCoy told him. Spock nodded, and McCoy asked, "Is there anything I can get you?"

Spock named an obscure drug. McCoy's eyebrows drew together quizzically - he hadn't really expected an answer. Now he was glad he had asked.

Spock explained. "It enables the Vulcan metabolism to absorb minerals and protein more quickly after a depletion in diet."

McCoy nodded. "I understand. I'll instruct Nurse Chapel to

bring some, and I'll ensure that you have a high protein diet brought to you. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"I shall be in a light healing trance for three days," said the Vulcan. "Would you wake me at the end of that time, please?"

"Certainly." McCoy made ready to depart.

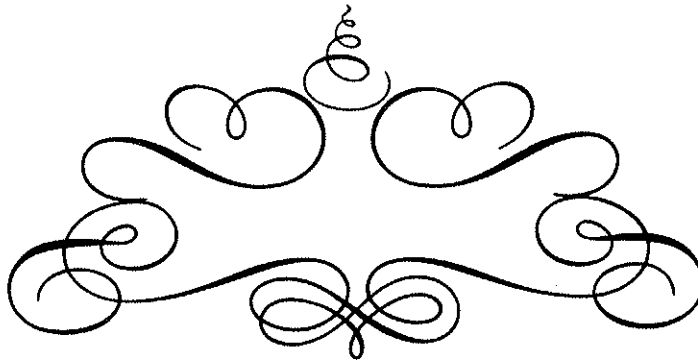
"And, Doctor..."

"Yes?"

"Thank you for your concern. There is one more thing."

"What's that?"

"In the meantime, please take great care of the Captain."



FATHER TO SON

(From 'A Time for Yesterday.' Spock to Zar.)

I long to say I'm proud of you, son,
And of the way you have grown.
Look at all the things you have done,
The ideas you have sown.

I long to say I love you, my son,
Like the mother you had known.
But love is something Vulcans, my son,
Don't feel right in showing.

I long to have you stay with me, son,
Give you the life you've briefly been shown.
But there are other things to be done,
And you should see your family growing.

I long to see you again, my son.
Perhaps in a time yet unknown,
When my past and your future are joined, my son,
And the universe finally grown.

Helen Connor

